# Conflict and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia



EDITED BY

FERNANDA PIRIE
& TONI HUBER

BRILL

BRILL'S TIBETAN STUDIES LIBRARY

# Conflict and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia

# Brill's Tibetan Studies Library

*Edited by*

Henk Blezer
Alex McKay
Charles Ramble

VOLUME 21

# Conflict and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia

*Edited by*

Fernanda Pirie
Toni Huber

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2008

*On the cover*: Young Tibetan at a community festival, Amdo Sharkhog, February 1996. (Photograph by Toni Huber).

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication data**

Conflict and social order in Tibet and inner Asia / edited by Fernanda Pirie, Toni Huber.
p. cm. — (Brill's Tibetan studies library ; v. 21)
Includes index.
ISBN 978-90-04-15817-7 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Social structure—Asia, Central—Case studies. 2. Social structure—China—Tibet—Case studies. 3. Social conflict—Asia, Central—Case studies. 4. Social conflict—China—Tibet—Case studies. 5. Asia, Central—Social conditions—Case studies. 6. Tibet (China)—Social conditions—Case studies. I. Pirie, Fernanda, 1964- II. Huber, Toni, 1956- III. Title. IV. Series.

HN670.22.A8C66 2008
305.800951—dc22

2008023224

ISSN 1568-6183
ISBN 978 90 04 15817 7



PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

FERNANDA PIRIE AND TONI HUBER

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the former Soviet Union were sites of revolution, social upheaval and reform in the twentieth century. Both areas have subsequently experienced dramatic changes in political philosophy and social organisation and moves by newly emergent nation states, more or less successfully, to loosen the political grip of communism and develop capitalist-style economies. The people in both regions have, thus, suffered a series of upheavals to their social order, as well as dramatic persecutions and purges. In this volume we ask about the experiences of the people affected by such social change, by revolution and its aftermath, by the upheavals of political campaigns and the power struggles among elite groups. We ask, in particular, about the significance of such events for their social order, for the ways in which they conceptualise and organise the ongoing pattern of relations amongst and between individuals, communities and the state.

Each chapter explores the experiences of one of the minority groups in Tibet, Mongolia and Siberia, regions which were incorporated into the Soviet Union and the PRC during the twentieth century. Following the communist revolutions, such groups experienced the collectivisation of their agricultural and pastoral activities, the persecution of sections of their populations, the denigration of their language, culture and religion, the devaluation of agriculture and other traditional occupations and, subsequently, the development of their economies and infrastructure. They have, in other words, undergone political, religious, economic and cultural upheavals and attempts, both deliberate and otherwise, to alter or undermine their so-called 'backward' or 'feudal' social orders.

This region, therefore, provides rich material to study the ways in which minority groups both react to incorporation within nation states and respond to dramatic social change. Rather than focussing, as many others have done, on the evidence of domination and

resistance, or the issue of nationalism, the chapters in this volume all illustrate the ways in which social order is generated, maintained and renegotiated at times of disruption. Each chapter is based on a study of one particular community's experience of social disruption, ranging from the Chinese Cultural Revolution and Soviet cultural campaigns of the mid-twentieth century to contemporary experiences of economic progress and national integration. They illustrate a variety of responses, ranging from dramatic resistance to incremental change, from social disintegration to the re-establishment of order, and the opportunistic activities undertaken by enterprising individuals. They illustrate, in particular, the resources available to actors caught up in such events—historical, cultural, political and religious.

Accordingly, the chapters in this volume reflect the historical trajectory of the self-conscious drive for modernity undertaken in both the Soviet region and the PRC and ongoing moves to secure the social integration of minority groups. In this Introduction we outline the historic processes that have affected the different parts of the region and go on to discuss the more theoretical issues that arise from the contrasting analyses of conflict and social order contained in this volume.

## REGIONAL PROCESSES

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, a so-called 'People's Revolution' took place in Mongolia in 1921. Although it was never part of the Soviet Union, the Mongolian People's Republic, established in 1924, was heavily influenced by Soviet policies until its collapse after 1990. As such, it was subject to socialist cultural campaigns that were designed to introduce new forms of order throughout the region. This succession of campaigns was a sustained and deliberate attempt to introduce the ideas and values needed to found a modern socialist state; through them the Mongolian population was subjected to an onslaught of new ideas about cleanliness, education and progress. These have had a lasting, and somewhat surprisingly tenacious, legacy as Ines Stolpe outlines in her chapter in this volume.

Subsequently, most of the post-Soviet region has been the site of dramatic economic reforms and the promotion of a market economy. Agnieszka Halemba, in her chapter in this volume, discusses the

effects of these reforms in southern Siberia, which has remained part of the Russian Federation. The privatization of land and development of a new nature park is regarded among the Altaian people of the region with suspicion. Comparing it with local reactions to the promotion of Buddhism, one of many religions now allowed to flourish in the region, Halemba traces the rise of grass-roots movements against both developments.

China's series of revolutions and power struggles resulted in the establishment of its communist state in 1949. The subsequent political trajectory saw widespread social disruption, particularly in the period from the instigation of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to Mao's death in 1976. Inner Mongolia came under the influence of China's communist state from the late 1940s. David Sneath, in his chapter in this volume, describes the series of conflicts that subsequently marked this region, apparently characterised by ethnic oppositions between rival Mongolian tribal groups. He documents the role of local elites in these events, who manoeuvred for power and influence through the successive stages of revolution, socialism and reform and engaged in factional conflicts. This study can be compared with the chapter by Goldstein, Ben Jiao and Tanzen Lhundup, who describe the factional fighting among Tibetan groups caught up in the Cultural Revolution. The role of local elites and their struggles for power are shown in both of these papers to be of great significance to the local experience of revolution.

The majority of Tibet[1] was officially brought under Chinese control in 1950, although the effects of the new regime did not make themselves felt in a dramatic way until the late 1950s, when revolts in eastern Tibet, the flight of the Dalai Lama to India and the collectivization of agricultural and pastoral practices effectively overturned the old social and political orders. The Cultural Revolution and its legacies are discussed, in this volume, in the chapters by Melvyn Goldstein and his co-authors, by Charlene Makley and by Jill Sudbury. In contrast to the Soviet cultural campaigns described by Stolpe, which largely employed techniques of persuasion and education, Mao's Cultural Revolution took the form of what Goldstein and Sudbury, in this volume, describe as 'state-sanctioned chaos'. Co-ordinated attempts were made to

[1] We are referring, here, to those parts of the region commonly known as 'ethnographic Tibet' that are now within the PRC (Huber and Pedersen 1997: 592 n.19). See Samuel (1993: chs 3–8) for an ethnographic overview of the region.

encourage local people to overturn the existing, government-sponsored order, with tragic and enduring consequences, not just for those immediately subject to persecution, but also for those caught up in the events as activists. Goldstein's chapter takes us to the heart of this violence and documents the different groups involved, their motivation and ideologies. The papers by Makley and Sudbury discuss the legacies of these events in the contemporary period and the ways in which local communities struggle to deal with those among them who acted as perpetrators during the Revolution. The subsequent reform period, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, began to effect the Tibetan areas in the 1980s. The development of a more bureaucratic administration, the introduction of the 'household responsibility system', a form of privatization of household property as a step towards economic reform, and the subsequently relentless drive for modernization and economic growth have all lead to profound changes in numerous aspects of local social order. In this volume Fernanda Pirie discusses contemporary tensions between traditional leaders and state representatives as guarantors of social order, particularly when it comes to the resolution of conflict and control of violence. Heidi Fjeld describes the re-emergence of polyandry, one of the social practices formerly common among certain classes in central Tibet, the types of conflict that it can now engender and their effects in the contemporary world. Andrew Fischer analyses the trajectory of apparently ethnic conflict in eastern Tibet. He links the emerging tensions between Tibetan and Muslim groups to broader economic developments in the region and, again, documents the significance of the role played by local elites.

## PARADIGMS OF CONFLICT

It is tempting to regard any conflict engaged in by a minority group within a larger nation state in terms of domination and resistance. As well as a reaction by a local group against the control exercised by a powerful centralised state, such conflict can be read as evidence of one of the disorders and divisions resulting directly from quasi-colonial activities, which have disrupted existing social and power structures. In Inner Asia, accordingly, many writers have studied forms of resistance to the nation state on the part of minority groups, or else the existence and development of nationalist movements

among them.[2] While these models and paradigms make sense of several important processes that have taken place here, many people's experiences of social change are not so polarised: they are less dominated by a sense of conflict, oppression and resistance than these paradigms might suggest. Some conflicts are instances of locally, rather than nationally, shaped power struggles. They may be characterised by adaptation and subtle shifts in expectations of government. They may be regarded as providing opportunities for the pursuit of local initiatives, interests and power struggles. The chapters in this volume all illustrate the complexity and subtleties of such processes.

One of the clearest examples of this is found in the chapter by Goldstein et al., who draw upon recently collected oral histories to reanalyse an incident that occurred during the Cultural Revolution. In this case a young Tibetan nun organised a violent uprising against the Chinese government. This, the 'Nyemo Ani' incident, has been analysed as a form of nationalistic resistance to the Chinese government by both Smith (1996) and Tsering Shakya (1999, 2002). Goldstein et al. demonstrate the extent to which the leaders of this movement were, in fact, engaged in a local power struggle with another factional group. Their supporters, by contrast, were local Tibetans, mostly motivated by the experience of economic conditions, in particular the imposition of a new grain tax. While the issue of nationalism was not absent, it was not the dominant motivation for these events. Similarly, Sneath's analysis of conflict in twentieth century Inner Mongolian describes the tensions and power struggles that emerged amongst the political elite, not so much in terms of nationalism or as a movement for autonomy, as a struggle between existing factions, both Mongolian and Han.

Halemba, in her analysis of local movements in southern Siberia, questions a related trope, that of indigenous people's attachment to the land and their associated religious beliefs and practices, as a motivation for resistance to the domination of a foreign state. She demonstrates the way in which resistance to the establishment of a national park on the part of people in the Altai Republic was

[2] The volumes edited by Barnett and Akiner (1994) and Schwartz (1994) are good examples of the former, while Smith (1996), Tsering Shakya (1999), Sautman and Dreyer (2006) (on Tibet), Rossabi (2004) (on China) and Bulag (1998, 2002) (on Inner Mongolia) document instances of nationalism in different regions.

primarily founded on a sense of dissatisfaction with a local elite, who were seen to be profiting from the new economic and political situation. Similarly, Pirie's analysis of a refusal, on the part of Tibetan nomads, to participate in the Chinese state's justice system, is presented not so much as a case of resistance to an alien regime, as an insistence on indigenous values and ideas about conflict, within the context of a general acceptance of the power of the state.

We would suggest, therefore, that all these studies highlight the need to move away from the paradigms that regard state and society, or a nation and its minority people, as being fundamentally opposed. We should not assume that any particular instance of conflict or disorder is the natural result of a struggle between the two, even in areas, such as these, where a state and its representatives have made deliberate and sustained attempts to undermine and alter the social order of a minority people; where they could be regarded as responsible for disruption, conflict and considerable suffering. Local communities adapt and adjust, resisting in some cases, accepting in others, creatively responding to new social conditions and often seizing the opportunity for personal or local advantage. The chapters in this volume illustrate the variety of ways in which this can be done.

## PARADIGMS OF ORDER

Conflict is often regarded as a social problem, as ruptured social relations requiring resolution. In any region undergoing profound change it is easy, therefore, to regard conflict as a sign of a disrupted and disintegrating social order. Certain forms of violence may, however, be integral to underlying and persisting social patterns. Many practices of violence, including feuding and warfare, are justified by the norms of retribution and revenge, the goals of livelihood and defence of property, or the idioms of ritual performance. Equally, conflict and violence may represent the strategies of an elite, trying to secure its own interests or vision of the future. However, even when new forms of conflict are locally feared as signs of instability and change, adaptation occurs and may continue over decades. Disruption to the social order, whether deliberate or not, can result in new forms of order, as much as in conflict or disorder. How, then, are we to understand the social

significance of the phenomena that arise in a region such as Inner Asia, during and after the dramatic social upheavals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

The context in which conflict and social disruption occur is almost always provided, or shaped, by the state. During the twentieth century, both the Soviet Union and the PRC made deliberate attempts to generate, impose and guarantee new forms of social order in the vast regions they dominated, in accordance with their visions of a modern communist society. In doing so, the PRC, in particular, generated, managed and manipulated social disruption and conflict, as several papers in this volume describe, while the Soviet Union successfully introduced new social ideas, as Stolpe's study demonstrates. Similar processes have been, and continue to be, undertaken by elite groups in more local contexts, whether they seek to co-opt the power of the state, or to generate new hierarchies of power and control, as the chapters by Sneath, Fischer and Halemba illustrate. Both the maintenance of order and the generation of conflict and violence can, in such circumstances, be attributed to the activities of those in positions of command and control, whether representatives of the state or not. They assume responsibility for social order, often also asserting a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

Patterns of order and instances of violence may also, however, be part of another type of social configuration, one that has little or nothing to do with that of the state, or even of any ruling body. Many localised patterns are, rather, based on historical, cultural or religious frameworks, shaped by ideas about belonging and identity, about the natural world and the cosmos, about gender and other social relations and about the nature and significance of violence, itself.

The existence of such different forms and sources of order is, particularly for the anthropologist, relatively uncontroversial. Numerous models of order have been proposed in the academic literature, many associated with the theories of either Durkheim or Weber. In the first case, the focus is on social order as a reflection of social norms and values, generated at the level of the community, from bottom upwards. In the second, order is presented as the achievement of a leader or state, successfully managing his following. (Roberts 2007: 16–18) Such patterns rarely exist in isolation, however, and it is the intersections between them that often prove most challenging, but also most revealing, as points of analysis for the social scientist. The state-generated disorders of Inner Asia

are discussed in this volume as phenomena experienced by different groups of minority people, each with its unique social history, incorporated into a nation state dominated by different ethnic groups, ideologies and power structures. The authors document the activities of those caught up in the resulting conflict and disorder, whether it is attributable to the state, to a local elite or to an indigenous community or movement.

In attempting to synthesise these two types of order, that is to make sense of the multiple sources of order and disorder that may impinge upon a single group or social context, it is helpful, we would suggest, to focus on the resources available to the local actors. These may be historical, cultural, religious, ethnic or nationalistic. It is by drawing on a range of possible sources of authority, ideas and discourses, that they are able to negotiate their way between competing forces of order and conflict, often creating localised forms of order.

## *State and Society*

The chapters in this volume reveal not only the extent to which the state and other powerful actors shape the local contexts in which order and conflict are generated, but also the cultural resources available to those within it. In Sneath's discussion of the struggle for power between different factions of the ruling elite in Inner Mongolia, for example, he reveals that the language of ethnonationalism and identity was often used as an instrument in factional manoeuvres. It would be wrong, he suggests, to regard that language as a straightforward reflection of underlying interests, or as the root cause of the conflict. It was more an instrument employed in the pursuit of factional interests, both Mongolian and Han. Moreover, the context in which such discourses were mobilised was always significantly determined by the state: during the revolutionary era minority cadres represented themselves as mobilising support for the communist cause; during the communist era such cadres could claim they were playing an important role in the administration; and during the current period of market socialism minority identity can be invoked as a 'cultural resource'.

Fischer, in his chapter in this volume, also reanalyses what appears, on the face of it, to be a contemporary ethnic conflict

between Tibetans and Muslims in eastern Tibet. He traces the causes of such conflict to wider social processes, including the economic developments that have bypassed large sections of Tibetan populations. As in Sneath's study, it can be seen that it is the state and its policies that have defined the context in which such conflict arises. Its policies have lead to the development of new economic opportunities and the marginalization of traditional herding practices on the plateau, while the Muslim populations have been better placed to take advantage of the new opportunities. Nevertheless, as in Inner Mongolia, it is a small number of elites, including religious leaders, who have been at the centre of the events which lead to the polarisation of the two populations and the violence between them; conflict which was generally initiated by allegations that Muslims had been trying to pollute the food they served to Tibetans in their restaurants, or to offend their religious sensibilities. Ethnic identities and sentiments, rather than defining the source and root cause of such conflict, have been a resource drawn upon by a small number of active elites in their pursuit of what they see as the wider interests of those they represent.

### *Religious Idioms*

Two papers on China's Cultural Revolution and its aftermath reveal the extent to which religion, in this case Buddhism and its associated narrative epics, provides a resource for those caught up in, or attempting to recover from, a period of social upheaval. Goldstein and his co-authors describe an armed faction that arose during the disorder of the Cultural Revolution, apparently representing Tibetan nationalist sentiment against Chinese oppression. They demonstrate how the collectivisation of agriculture had given rise to local resentment, prompted, in particular, by the introduction of a new form of taxation, as well as fear of social disruption and uncertainty. At the same time, local factions of Red Guards, some of the many encouraged by Mao's Cultural Revolution, albeit here with a significant Tibetan component, were struggling for power. One of these factions was able to draw on this local resentment to support their movement. But the catalyst for the armed uprising was a young nun, who manifested herself as Ani Gongmey Gyemo, the aunt of Gesar, the hero of a Tibetan epic narrative and a king responsible for

promoting and protecting the growth of Buddhism in Tibet. The nun established a following of 'warrior heroes', local villagers said to be possessed by the generals of Gesar's army. The local Red Army faction was able to draw upon the religious forces represented by the nun and her followers to mobilise the local population and launch their armed offensive.

Also discussing the Cultural Revolution and its legacies in central Tibet, Sudbury, in her chapter in this volume, analyses the disorder, not just physical but also cosmological, caused by the destruction of local monasteries. This destruction, and the fate of its perpetrators, who were generally members of the local community itself, are interpreted in accordance with the Buddhist idiom of karma, which is seen as being responsible for their subsequently painful and traumatic deaths. At the same time, the reordering of the community requires the reinstatement of the physical structures of the monastery, with, as far as possible, original materials, many of which had been incorporated into new secular buildings. Thus, a process of destruction is needed before reconstruction can be completed. The result is an apparently physical disorder around the site of the old monastery, but it is a disorder which represents a slow progress, hampered by the poverty of the community, towards a combined physical and cosmological order, one which is manifest in the envisioned relationship between the monastery and lay community.

In a very different context, Halemba's study demonstrates the extent to which cosmological beliefs and practices have become central to local movements in the republic of Altai in the contemporary Russian Federation. These have resisted the promotion of organised religion, in this case Buddhism, as well as the implementation of a new property regime. Although this region was influenced by the beliefs and practices of Buddhism before the Communist Revolution, there are also local ideas about the cosmological world, the nature and activities of local spirits and associated concepts of purity. The promotion of (Tibetan-style) Buddhism through the building of a stūpa shrine is seen as a threat to the stability of this world. It is feared that it will lead to the suppression of local deities, forcibly tamed by the representatives of the organised religion. The same movement, as Halemba demonstrates, has voiced objections to the creation of a new nature park. She traces both of these attitudes to a suspicion of local elites, who are regarded as unduly benefiting from the new economic regime.

The different aspects of this movement, therefore, all use the language of religion, invoking the sacred nature of the land and the harm that is likely to occur to the spirits. Local religious and cosmological idioms are being used to express objections to the new social and economic order and those seen to be unfairly profiting within it.

### *Conceptual Resources*

Both the Soviet cultural campaigns and China's Cultural Revolution have had lasting legacies. Two contrasting papers show the ways in which those affected were persuaded, or forced, to rethink the concepts with which they make sense of their social order. In each case, elements of resistance to the new social order were matched by elements of adaptation and creative change.

Stolpe, in her chapter in this volume, describes the series of campaigns by which new concepts of hygiene, as well as education, were introduced as a means of promoting a new socialist society in Mongolia. She traces the way in which local actors were employed to monitor and enforce the new regimes of hygiene, undertaking peripatetic campaigns among nomadic pastoralists. Her chapter describes the pastoralists' forms of resistance and adaptation, which included refusal, mimicry and excessive compliance. However, at the end of her chapter she presents a handful of vignettes from the contemporary era, which demonstrate the deep root that some of these concepts have taken. The awards for good citizens instigated by the Soviet regime are being reinstated in local contexts. Moreover, the language of 'cleanliness' is now found, not just in the carriages of the national train company, but also in the unprompted comments of those who use its services.

In China, too, the communist regime made a deliberate attempt to introduce new social concepts. One of these was gender equality. Another was that of the modern, democratic nation state, referred to by the term *gongjia*, literally 'public property'. In her chapter, Makley describes the way in which the latter was subverted in eastern Tibet by the addition of a Tibetan patriarchal term, *Apa*, to present the state as an anthropomorphic paternal agent, and one responsible for the violence of the Cultural Revolution. This subtly undermined the official historiography, which presented the violence

as part of the People's Revolution, generated spontaneously by those on the ground revolting against their unjust leaders. The Cultural Revolution, of course, involved a much more dramatic upheaval to the social order than the Soviet campaigns carried out in Mongolia. Subsequently, as Makley documents, the reform period has seen the reestablishment of gendered social practices in Tibet, particularly in connection with religion, thus undermining the ideologies of gender equality, which remain official policy. In these ways, therefore, the Tibetans are refusing to participate in the new ideological order. The Cultural Revolution also involved the persecution of those regarded as being from the wrong class background. Like Sudbury, Makley discusses the memories of these events and the narratives that surround them. Those who became caught up in the campaigns as perpetrators are still remembered and quietly scorned, obliquely described as illegitimate patriarchs, who profited during the time of state-sponsored chaos.

## *Patterns of Disorder*

Even in situations in which the state has been responsible for dramatic upheavals in the social order, instances of disorder can still be attributable to social patterns and expectations that have little or nothing to do with the new regime imposed from above. Indeed, as Pirie shows in her chapter on patterns of feuding among the nomads of eastern Tibet, a certain type of conflict has been part of tribal relations on this part of the plateau for as long as history recounts. Pirie describes the ways in which the nomads pursue relations of revenge, which are based on tribal loyalties and depend, for their resolution, on the authority of hereditary leaders or reincarnate Buddhist lamas. The nomads' insistence on the continuation of such relations, in defiance of the legal order implemented by government officials, could be seen as a form of resistance to the authority of the state as a guarantor of order. However, as she describes, it also needs to be understood as a reflection of ontological ideas about the individual and the relations between individual, community and authority figures. While the state's legal regime has altered the ways in which feuds can be pursued and mediated, Pirie suggests that the underlying ideas about the individual and authority continue to shape social relations and the instances of disorder that arise here.

A different type of disorder is described by Fjeld, in her chapter in this volume. Presenting material from central Tibet, she documents the reestablishment of practices of polyandry, a form of marriage formerly found only among the aristocratic and land-owning peasant classes, and suppressed under the Chinese regime. In the reform period fraternal polyandry is reemerging, associated with social mobility, a marker of membership of an upper, land-owning class, to which all peasants can now aspire. However, as she describes, such marriage arrangements have always lead to certain types of instability in household structures. Contemporary fieldwork in an area where the practice has reemerged allows her to shed new light on old debates about the nature of this practice, the inherent instabilities, the consequences for the nature of the Tibetan household and the relations amongst its members. Again, this is an instance where dramatic changes to social structures have been followed by the reemergence of social practices that defy the new social order and are, paradoxically, revealed in patterns of instability and disorder. In both these cases, therefore, conflict is expressive of cultural ideas and practices, fundamental to the local social order, rather than being an instance of resistance or the instrument of a state or elite group trying to achieve its own goals.

## CONCLUSION

This volume documents and analyses just some of the numerous types of order and disorder, conflict and reconstruction that have been experienced by minority groups in Inner Asia. The context has been a series of upheavals that have shaken these regions and their minority people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this Introduction we have neither attempted to develop a typology of order or conflict nor to make systematic comparisons, based on differences in historical period, national government, economic, political or social factors. Indeed, the papers have indicated that in any particular instance, the development of conflict or order is as much dependent upon the interests and world-views of local actors and the relations between them, as it is shaped by external factors.

The state and/or local power-holders always determine the context in which conflict and order develop. The chapters in this volume illustrate the different ways in which such processes impinge upon

local communities, but also the different historical, cultural and religious resources that these same communities draw upon in order to resist or renegotiate a new form of social order. It is the dialectical relationship between these different social forces that are explored by the authors herein, whether they take the form of a framework or concepts of order (or disorder) imposed from above, conflict generated or promoted by powerful actors, patterns of order generated from below and founded in historical, religious or cultural tradition, or acts of resistance and protest.

The authors look behind what are usually characterized as 'ethnic tensions', what might appear to be forms of resistance to a dominant state and apparently nationalist movements. They highlight the agency of local actors and the extent to which they can and do shape local forms of order, even within and after the most dramatic types of social upheaval.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The chapters in this volume were originally presented as papers at the international conference Conflict, Religion and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia. The conference was organized by the Editors, and hosted by the Central Asian Seminar, Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin, on 18–19 November, 2005. We would like to sincerely thank the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Köln) for generously funding the conference, and acknowledge the important additional support we gained from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Halle) and the Humboldt University (Berlin). While it has only been possible to publish nine of the fifteen papers originally presented at the conference, the chapters herein nevertheless represent very well the breadth and depth of the issues that were raised and discussed by all the participants during the two day meeting.

We are grateful to Alex McKay for his useful editorial comments on the manuscript, and to Albert Hoffstädt at Brill for accepting the book into Brill's Tibetan Studies Library. We thank Patricia Radder for her good advice and assistance during production. We also appreciate the important role played by Tina Niermann, Norma Schulz and Katja Schwarz of the Central Asian Seminar at the Humboldt University during the final stages of production.

## REFERENCES


Barnett, Robert and Shirin Akiner (eds), 1994. *Resistance and reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst.

Bulag, Uradyn 1998. *Nationalism and hybridity in Mongolia*. Oxford: Clarendon.

—— 2002. *The Mongols at China's Edge: history and the politics of national unity*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Huber, Toni and Poul Pedersen 1997. Meteorological knowledge and environmental ideas in traditional and modern societies: the case of Tibet. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3: 577–97.

Roberts, Simon 2007. Order and the evocation of heritage: representing quality in the French biscuit trade. *In* K. von Benda-Beckmann and F. Pirie (eds), *Order and disorder: anthropological perspectives*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Rossabi, Morris (ed.) 2004. *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*. Seattle, University of Washington Press.

Samuel, Geoffrey 1993. *Civilized shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan societies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Sautman, Barry and June Dreyer 2006. *Contemporary Tibet: politics, development, and society in a disputed region.* Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.

Schwartz, Ronald 1994. *Circle of Protest: political ritual in the Tibetan uprising*. London: Hurst.

Smith, Warren 1996. *Tibetan Nation: a history of Tibetan nationalism and Sino-Tibetan relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Tsering Shakya 1999. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*. New York: Columbia University Press.

—— 2002. Blood in the Snows. *New Left Review*, 15: 39–60.

# CONFLICT AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: THE NYEMO ANI INCIDENT OF 1969

MELVYN C. GOLDSTEIN, BEN JIAO, TANZEN LHUNDUP[1]

## INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly little has been written about the violence that engulfed Tibet during the Cultural Revolution. In this paper, we examine one of the most famous examples of such violence, the 1969 armed attacks that occurred in Nyemo county. The Nyemo incident occurred during a twenty day period in June 1969 during which fifty-four members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), cadres, activists and other Tibetans were killed and another twenty or so had limbs hacked off, supposedly under the direction of Trinley Chödrön, a young nun from the area.[2] The Chinese side initially labelled this incident negatively as an 'Armed Counter-Revolutionary Rebellion', while the exiles have also seen it as a rebellion, but in a positive sense, valorizing the nun as a great female freedom fighter who bravely fought the Chinese to defend Tibet.[3] It is often called the 'Second Tibetan Revolt', the first being the resistance to the Chinese occupation that erupted in 1959. Neither side, however, has written about the incident in anything but the most cursory fashion.

The academic literature on Tibet's Cultural Revolution in general and the Nyemo incident in particular, is also limited. One of the most widely cited academic accounts comes from Warren Smith's (1996) monograph, *Tibetan Nation*. Smith's basic view is that the Nyemo incident was a nationalist conflict between Tibet's two revolutionary mass organizations, Gyenlo and Nyamdre, which arose as a result of

---

[1] This paper derives from a longer book-length examination of this incident (Goldstein et al. in press).

[2] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974; Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian, 1987.

[3] Tibetan Women's Association commemorative volume title, 'Roof of the World: A celebration of Culture, Peace and Protest', 1995, Bombay India (url: www.tibet.ca/en/wtnarchive/1995/3/15-2_1.html)

the Communist Party's attack on all aspects of Tibetan culture during the Cultural Revolution. Smith asserts, incorrectly as we shall see, that as the Revolution progressed they polarized along ethnic lines, the Gyenlo faction becoming predominately Tibetan while the Nyamdre faction became mostly Chinese. Therefore, he states, the "factional conflict in Tibet … took on a nationalistic content previously absent." (1996: 548) Smith's position is that despite the presence of other factors such as food shortages and the start of communes, the Nyemo incident was essentially an expression of Tibetan anger at Chinese oppression—a rising of the oppressed minority ethnic Tibetans against their majority Han tormentors. Smith agrees with those exile Tibetans who have labelled the events in Nyemo as the 'Second Tibetan Revolt'.[4]

A second well-known scholar of modern Tibet, Tsering Shakya, has also discussed the Nyemo disturbances, describing them interchangeably as a rebellion and a revolt:

> In 1969 there was widespread rebellion throughout Tibet, eventually crushed by the PLA. The best-documented episode is the revolt led by Trinley Chodron, a young nun from the *xian* (county) of Nyemo, who marched her followers—armed with swords and spears—to the local Party headquarters, and slaughtered both the Chinese officials and the Tibetan cadres working for them. At first the Party ignored the massacre, thinking it was a manifestation of the Cultural Revolution —as we know, murders could be exonerated if they fell under the rubric of class struggle.
>
> But the authorities soon realized that these Tibetan peasants were rebelling not in the name of the 'newly liberated serfs' but in defense of their faith. What was more, they targeted only Chinese Party officials and those Tibetans seen as colluding with the colonizing power. The revolt spread from Nyemo through eighteen *xian*s of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), and the Party was forced to send in the PLA to suppress it. (Tsering Shakya 2002: 39–40)[5]

---

[4] Jigme Ngagpo (1988: 24), for example, refers to this incident as a movement for the independence of Tibet. Wei Se (Öser), a Tibetan writer living in China, writes in a recent book and blog (2005, 2006) that it is very difficult to understand this incident, yet basically also says that she agrees with the interpretation that this was a second revolt for independence.

[5] See also Tsering Shakya (1999: 343–47).

Shakya concludes that the revolt was a millenarian uprising and an insurgency characterized by a passionate desire to be rid of the oppressor.[6]

A third, very different, interpretation comes from Wang Lixiong, a well known Chinese intellectual interested in Tibet. He rejects the nationalistic arguments and the idea of a Second Tibetan Revolt. Instead he explains the incident as a reaction against the introduction of communes in Tibet, saying:

> In 1969, an armed 'revolt' broke out against the introduction of People's Communes into Tibet, which had been spared them in the period of the Great Leap Forward; this eventually spread to over forty counties. The Dalai's camp saw this 'Second Tibetan Rebellion' as a continuation of the resistance of the fifties. In reality, the two were very different. During the earlier uprising, the peasants were fighting, in a sense, for the interests of the aristocracy. In 1969, they fought for their own ends. They did not want the pastures and livestock that had been redistributed among them from the old landowners to be appropriated by the People's Communes. … The 'nationality question', later the cause of so much trouble, seemed scarcely worth consideration. Tibetans seemed on generally calm terms with the Han and the Dalai Lama almost forgotten, both in Tibet and in the West. (Wang Lixiong 2002: 88)

Tsering Shakya responded sharply to Wang's interpretation saying:

> His account secularizes the rebellion, explaining it in utilitarian terms—the peasants wanted to protect the gains of the initial land reforms from the extension of People's Communes—while stripping it of the cultural and religious elements that reveal its nationalist content. In doing so, he grossly distorts the historical record. For example: Trinley Chodron told the PLA after her capture that she had been visited by a bird who had come as a messenger from the Dalai Lama, and who had told her to drive out the Chinese. Other rebels claimed to be reincarnations of Ling Gesar, the mythical hero-king of Tibetan epic who fought for the Buddhist religion. There can be no mistaking the symbolism here. Indeed, we can describe the revolt of 1969 as a millenarian uprising, an insurgency characterized by a passionate desire to be rid of the oppressor. (Tsering Shakya 2002: 40)

---

[6] Diemberger (2005: 164) discusses this incident very briefly in an article on female oracles and agrees with Shakya in seeing this as a millenarian movement. Barnett (2005: 349) also sees this as a Tibetan versus Chinese incident, albeit Tibetans against the state rather than against Han Chinese *per se*.

Smith and Shakya, therefore, characterise this as a fundamentally nationalistic affair which pitted Tibetans against Chinese, while Wang explains it primarily in terms of Tibetans' opposition to communes, that is peasant economic self-interest. Wang's dismissal of nationalistic motives has led Shakya to charge him with gross distortion of the historical record, but is this a fair assessment? Alternatively, might not Smith and Shakya have also distorted the historical record, inadvertently to be sure, by downplaying economic motives?

While all of these explanations contain elements of truth, new data about the history of the Nyemo conflict reveals a far more convoluted etiology which is inexorably intertwined with the bitter factional struggle that raged in Lhasa in 1967–69 between Tibet's two main revolutionary masses' organizations. The new data come from two sources: firstly interviews in the Tibet Autonomous Region with over seventy Tibetans from Nyemo and neighbouring areas, which was obtained as part of a larger project on change in Tibet during which we collected roughly 600 oral/life histories of Tibetans from all walks of life; and secondly a set of recently discovered Chinese documents that were brought into India after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Together they reveal new dimensions of the incident and compel us to revise our understanding of one of the most important conflicts in post-1959 Tibetan history.

The Nyemo incident cannot be understood without some knowledge of the early years of the Cultural Revolution in Lhasa.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN LHASA

The most powerful figure in Tibet at the start of the Cultural Revolution was Zhang Guohua, the military commander who had come to Tibet in October 1951 as the head of the main PLA military force, the 18th Army Corps. He remained in Tibet and in 1966 was in control of the three main organs of power—the Regional Party Committee, the People's Assembly of the TAR and the Tibet Military Area Headquarters.[7] Under Zhang Guohua's leadership the Regional Party Committee held an enlarged meeting in Nyingtri

[7] The Cultural Revolution in Lhasa is discussed more fully in Goldstein et al. (in press, chapter one). Goldstein is also preparing a lengthy oral history of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet.

(Kongpo) from 15 June to 5 July 1966 to discuss how to implement the Cultural Revolution. From the start, Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee sought to manipulate the Cultural Revolution so that they, rather than local Red Guards or other revolutionary workers and cadres, would be in control of mass demonstrations and struggle sessions against the 'holders of power' in the party. He felt strongly that Tibet's special conditions—the 1959 uprising, the onset of democratic reforms, and the Sino-Indian war—required special consideration during the Cultural Revolution. In short, Tibet, in his view, needed a stable political environment and this justified a special implementation of the Revolution in which stability in the party and government would not be threatened. Just as he had in the 1950s, he again favoured going slow in Tibet.[8] He, therefore, tried to decide who among the power holders were reactionaries, that is whom to sacrifice. For example, at the meeting in Nyingtri a few important party members like Jin Sha (chief editor of the *Tibet Daily Newspaper* and deputy minister of TAR's propaganda department)[9] were accused and set out to be examined and criticized by the masses.[10] Zhang Guohua's idea was for the Cultural Revolution to be played out under the close scrutiny of the Regional Party Committee according to a carefully scripted score.

At about the same time, Tibetan students in Lhasa, not wanting to be left behind the rest of the country, started organizing their participation in the new campaign. One former Red Guard leader in Lhasa explained this in an interview:

> I remember that in August 1966 the Red Guards were everywhere in the whole country and Lhasa didn't want to be left behind. Therefore we formed our own Red Guard organizations. … Most of the students in my school were Tibetans. It was a concern that the Tibetan students might get into trouble [so] the Party Branch at the Lhasa Middle School decided to select a few young teachers to join the Red Guards,

[8] See Goldstein (2007) for a detailed examination of Chinese policies in the first half of the 1950s in Tibet.

[9] Other cadres singled-out were Hui Yiran, He Zhuyin, Huang Mao, and Luo Shisheng, (Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, ed. 1995, entries for 15 June to 5 July and 8 July 1966: 174–75).

[10] Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, ed. 1995, entry for 15 June to 5 July 1966: 174.

> working as leaders. I remember I used to lead students to destroy the 'four old' customs.[11]

The arrival of Red Guards from outside Tibet in September 1966 quickly radicalized the situation in Lhasa and created serious conflict between certain Red Guard units and the Tibet Party Establishment over how the Cultural Revolution should proceed. The young revolutionaries in Lhasa felt that adhering to Mao's call to 'bombard the headquarters,' meant pointing the spearhead of the Cultural Revolution at Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee, although initially it was not clear to them who were the bourgeois elements that had infiltrated the Regional Party Committee. The same leader also recalled:

> … Actually, we didn't have any idea about the Cultural Revolution when we first got involved. We were not sure who the 'capitalist roaders' were. We didn't have any contact with people at the Regional Party Committee, so we didn't know much about them, but we thought we should see whether we could find followers of the 'capitalist road' in Tibet. …
>
> Our group had clear aims. We were trying to "turn the world upside down" (laughs) and "find out all the 'capitalist roaders,' knock them off, and step on them". (laughs) That was the language people used at that time … Well, those people [other revolutionary factions] who were close to the leaders at the Regional Party Committee were later called 'royalists.' They argued that the leaders were nice people and had been working hard for the local residents. However, we didn't care about that. What we really cared about were the orders from the Central Committee [to search out the capitalist roaders who had snuck into the party] that we knew we were supposed to follow. It was fine with us if none of the leaders were capitalist roaders, but if there were any we wanted to go ahead and struggle against them.[12]

Throughout October, Zhang Guohua tried to maintain stability by preventing more Red Guards, particularly Han Red Guards from Beijing, from coming to Tibet and further radicalizing the Cultural Revolution there. Zhang, therefore, explicitly asked Premier Zhou Enlai to order the various Cultural Revolution organizations not to

---

[11] Interview, 2001, H.0109.01, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. The combination of numbers and letters—H.0109.01—refers to the catalogue number for that interview in the forthcoming web-based Tibet Oral History Archive. Names are omitted, in order to protect the identity of the subjects.

[12] Interview, 2001, H.0109.01, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

allow Han Chinese Red Guards to come to Tibet.[13] Zhou approved this, but the Red Guard groups from Beijing ignored the order and in early November Metropolitan Red Guards arrived from Beijing and set up the Blazing Prairie Combat Regiment (Ch. *liaoyuan zhandou tuan*).

On 16 November the State Council reiterated its ban on Red Guards going to Tibet and then on 4 December it announced new regulations specifically requiring the Red Guards from inland China who were still in Lhasa to leave Tibet by 20 December and return to their own localities. The Regional Party Committee actually organized a 'farewell meeting' for the departing Red Guards. However, this was not realized as the Beijing Red Guards in Lhasa appealed to the powerful Central Great Cultural Revolution Group (Ch. *zhongyang wenhua da geming weiyuanhui*) in Beijing headed by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, saying that their presence was critical to eliminate the bourgeois reactionary line that was present in Tibet. To the chagrin of Zhang Guohua, the Central Great Cultural Revolution Group supported them and gave the Beijing Red Guards permission to remain (Yang 1967: 46).[14]

In mid-December 1966 a number of the more anti-establishment (anti-Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee) Red Guard groups in Lhasa, such as the Blazing Prairie, merged into the organization called Gyenlo (Tib. *gyen log*, Ch. *zao fan*), the Rebels.[15] This new radical revolutionary group then started to escalate attacks on the existing authority structure. The focus of the spearhead now shifted in a serious way toward the Party leadership, particularly toward Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee itself.[16] This quickly turned Tibet into the chaos that the Party Establishment had feared would ensue if the Red Guards from elsewhere were allowed to remain and the Cultural Revolution was not carefully managed.

---

[13] Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui bian, 1995, entries for 19 October 1966 and 28 October 1966: 178–79. See also Yang (1967: 46).

[14] This is also mentioned in Xizang renmin guangbo diantai lianhe zuozhanbu, 1967.

[15] Guanyu qingshi zhichi zuopai qunzhong zuzhi 'dalianzhi' de baogao, 1967: 1. Zaofan was a common name employed by revolutionary groups throughout China, although there was no central command headquarters for all such groups.

[16] Guanyu qingshi zhichi zuopai qunzhong zuzhi 'dalianzhi' de baogao, 1967: 1.

Soon after this, on 5 February 1967, another group of revolutionary factions more supportive of the Party establishment organized their own large revolutionary masses group called Nyamdre (Tib. *mnyam 'brel tshogs pa chen mo*; Ch. *dalianzhi*) or the Great Alliance. Both factions included ethnic Tibetans and Han and claimed to be following Mao's ideology. They fought bitterly for control of offices and neighbourhoods in Lhasa and for almost two years (1966–68) Lhasa and its environs experienced battles and killings between the two groups, first with spears, swords and sling shots and then, starting in January 1968, with guns and bombs. The western and northern sides of Lhasa were controlled by Gyenlo while the centre was mostly controlled by Nyamdre.

In the midst of this conflict, a signal event took place on 7 June 1968 when the PLA stormed the Jokhang temple and killed thirteen Gyenlo activists who had seized it and put up loudspeakers to blare propaganda. This event is too complicated to discuss here, but suffice to say that for Gyenlo it created intense hatred of the army and Nyamdre and a desire to avenge these 'murders'. In their view, the PLA, which was supposed to remain neutral in the Cultural Revolution, had now inappropriately sided with the Nyamdre faction (Goldstein et al. in press).

1968 also saw the central government make a major attempt to stop the factional fighting in Lhasa (and Tibet) by summoning the leaders of Gyenlo and Nyamdre to Beijing for major meetings. This, however, proved ineffectual and in Lhasa the fighting continued. Meanwhile, serious factional conflict actually intensified in some rural counties, such as Nyemo.

## THE NYEMO COUNTY INCIDENT, FIRST PHASE

Nyamdre was initially the dominant revolutionary group in Nyemo and most cadres were members, as were most of the villagers. However, as the animosity and competition between Gyenlo and Nyamdre intensified in Lhasa, Gyenlo's leaders in Nyemo sought to increase their strength and to displace Nyamdre from its position of control in the county. As it happened, widespread rural anger over economic policies at this time gave Gyenlo a unique opportunity to win over the peasantry.

The implementation of Democratic Reforms in 1959 had ended the feudal system, redistributing the estates of aristocrats and monasteries to the poorest households and terminating all corvée labour obligations. A system of 'Mutual Aid Groups' (Tib. *rogs re tshogs chung*; Ch. *huzhu zu*) was initiated as a precursor to collectives, but while this involved some cooperation between small groups of households, each household retained all the yields from its own land, as had traditionally been the case.

The new socialist system also added two major tax obligations. One of these, 'patriotic donation grain' (Tib. *rgyal gces gzhung 'bru*; Ch. *gong liang*), required households to send grain to the government without payment. A second, more onerous, obligation was called 'sales grain' (Tib. *tshong 'bru*; Ch. *gou liang*). It required households to sell a portion of their grain yield to the state at government-set prices, although the poorest households were sometimes exempted or the amount they owed was reduced.[17] In theory, this was 'surplus' grain the farmers did not need, but in reality it was not.

Initially these collections were small, even from the middle and rich farming households who were taxed more heavily. However, by 1965 these extractions had begun to increase substantially, mainly because officials were over-reporting the size of the total yields to improve their own performance records. Since the amount of grain to be given as 'patriotic' and 'selling' grain was calculated as a percentage of the size of the yield, inflated yields meant proportionally larger taxes, even though the real yields had not increased. By 1968 food shortages were being experienced and there was speculation that in the future peasants households would be left with only twelve *khe* (168 kg)[18] of grain a year per person for both their food needs and all other necessities, such as tea, salt and fertilizer. Two villagers explained:

> They were saying that we got yields that we actually didn't get. … After the threshing was over, they would come to calculate. … After that, they would just tell us that you had this amount of yield, no matter whether we got that or not. … We didn't have any chance to say no. They would just tell us, "You got this yield, so you should deliver this amount of donation grain and sell this amount of selling

[17] Interview, 2002, OR.0304.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[18] A *kh*e (Tib. *khal*) was a traditional volume measurement equal to about twenty-eight *jin* (fourteen kg).

> grain". … No matter whether we had that much surplus grain, we had to deliver it. That was the way the government collected the grain.[19]
>
> …Every year the output was increasing [on paper], so the tax grain and selling grain were increasing every year. Usually the tax grain was reasonable but the selling grain was very heavy. Because of this, the rebellion of 1968 and 1969 arose. Because the obligation of selling grain had increased a lot, people became poorer and poorer. Because the livelihood of many people had become very hard they participated in the rebellion and became reactionaries.[20]

Also distressing for many village households was the news that socialist collectives were about to be implemented. Nyemo peasants correctly understood this to mean that the state would take back the land and animals they had recently received, at the time of Democratic Reforms, or had been allowed to continue to utilize.

In 1968 Gyenlo leaders in Nyemo set out to harness this fear and anger in order to mobilize the peasantry behind them and wrest political control from Nyamdre. In normal circumstances, planning to overthrow those in power in the communist party would have been regarded as counter-revolutionary and unthinkable, but the Cultural Revolution was not normal circumstances. Gyenlo was a revolutionary masses' organization lead by people who believed that displacing Nyamdre—the power holders who, in their eyes, were on the 'wrong path'—was proper in revolutionary terms and in keeping with Mao's dictates to root out reactionaries by 'bombarding the headquarters' and 'destroying the holders of power' in the communist party and government.

Gyenlo, moreover, was well positioned to do this because its leaders were pragmatic, opportunistic and knowledgeable about local conditions and attitudes. Zhang Yongfu, the head of Gyenlo in Nyemo, for example, was an unusual Han cadre who spoke Tibetan and was at ease in the villages where he often stayed with Tibetan families and consumed Tibetan tsamba and butter tea. In addition to him and other Chinese cadres, there were also a number of Tibetans, the most influential of whom was Rangjung (Tib. *rang byung*), who later became the main bridge between the nun and Gyenlo, as well as the deputy commander of the military movement that was later formed.

---

[19] Interview, 2002, OR.0365.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[20] Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

Rangjung was not, however, some pious Tibetan from a former upper class family. He was a tough leftist activist in his thirties from a poor class background and had been a 'lifetime servant' (Tib. *tshe g.yog*) in the old society. After 1959 he had been a minor local official serving for a time as the head of the security office in Nyemo township (Ch. *xiang*)[21] where he was known for his hostility and cruelty toward class enemies, including monks and nuns. He was also one of the first Tibetans to join Gyenlo and quickly became a leader. Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu lived near each other and were friends.

Gyenlo's strategy in 1968 was, on the one hand, to criticize the Nyamdre establishment for imposing, in their language, reactionary bourgeois economic policies, which created the conditions the peasants feared and hated, and, on the other hand, to promise an alternative economic program which would allow villagers to keep more grain. The report of a government investigation on Gyenlo and the Nyemo incident, undertaken in 1974, discussed this:

> Since 1967, Zhang Yongfu … and some other people have been taking advantage of the problem of grain to viciously attack Party policies. They said, "The grain policies are Liu Shaoqi's policies. The policy of grain and oil purchases by the state carried out by the … County Party Committee … was implementing the reactionary capitalist line. Now it is up to the people how much grain and rapeseed oil they would like to hand in. And if they want, they can hand in nothing. Before Liberation, every person could get eighteen *khe* of grain but now every person can only have twelve *khe*. If a person joins our organization, he can get eighteen *khe* of grain and we will not have People's Communes." … the revolt is to stop the oil and grain collections and purchases by the state."[22]

Most of the Nyemo villagers who were interviewed also talked about this as the major factor that attracted them, and others, to Gyenlo. For example:

> At that time Gyenlo was mobilizing people, telling them that if they joined Gyenlo they would give them eighteen *khe* of barley. They raised the anger of the masses.[23]

---

[21] A *xiang* is conventionally translated as a rural *township* but is actually an administrative unit that consists of a number of adjacent villages.

[22] Nimu wenti fucha zu 1974.

[23] Interview, 2000, OR.0025, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

> Gyenlo was saying, "Even in the dark and cruel old society, servants were paid eighteen *khe* of barley as wages, but now in the era of the revolution, we have only twelve *khe* of grain as rations. So we are correct to rebel; it is no crime to make revolution." Because of that talk, Gyenlo became larger and larger in Nyemo.[24]

Gyenlo also played on the peasants' fear of collectivization by opposing it. However, being leftist revolutionaries, they did this on technical, rather than ideological, grounds, saying that conditions in Nyemo were not yet appropriate for communal farming, which meant that forcible implementation of such a system would be premature and impoverish the peasantry.[25]

Of course, food and collectivization were not the only things that angered the villagers. There was also anger at the anti 'Four Olds' Campaign, especially its new prohibitions on all forms of religious practice. Despite the demise of organized religion and closure of monasteries and nunneries after 1959, individuals had been permitted to continue to practise religion on a private basis in their homes. However, not only had that ended with the onset of the Cultural Revolution, but Red Guards had systematically searched houses to collect and destroy religious objects, such as statues and prayer wheels, while also mobilizing villagers to physically tear down temples and monasteries. A 1987 government report on the Nyemo incident cited this as a factor:

> Another example [of 'mistakes and shortcomings'] was the Party's policy on the freedom of pursuing religious beliefs. We used to talk too much but do too little to help people with their religious needs. We put too much emphasis on opposing religious beliefs. Especially during the Great Cultural Revolution, religious beliefs were accused as one of the 'four olds' and nobody was allowed to believe in any religion. People did not like our policies and once something tempting about religion appeared, the masses would be easily fooled. …[26]

However, while many villagers were angry about the physical destruction of monasteries and the ban on private religious practices, organized religion had already been destroyed in 1959 and the more immediate problem they faced was the shortage of food that would result from the following year's grain extractions. These were the

[24] Interview, 2002, OR.0350.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[25] Interview, 2002, OR.0288.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[26] Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian guanyu jiang yuan ding, 1987.

concerns on which Gyenlo played and what attracted the masses to join the movement. The 1974 report explained:

> Instigated by these people [Gyenlo], many meetings were held to attack our Party's policy of rapeseed oil and grain purchases by the state. At these people said, "Nyemo county has made us suffer the 'the three empties' (Ch. *san kong*)—empty houses, empty pockets, and empty stomachs. We have been suffering from hunger for about three or four years. The warehouses of the county are filled with the grain of the rich and middle class peasants. In the past we had dissatisfaction deep in our hearts but dared not speak them out. Now it is time for us to rise up. Our revolt is to stop the oil and grain collections and purchases by the state."[27]

In the first half of 1968, therefore, Zhang Yongfu and Gyenlo increased their efforts to win over Tibetan villagers, laying the blame for the current food situation on the Nyamdre establishment and its ideologically incorrect views, and telling the people they had the right to retain more of their yields. They also encouraged villagers to refuse to pay the 1968 grain extractions and to use the revolutionary struggle sessions against the power holders to attack the Nyamdre cadres who were collecting these taxes. More generally, they advocated that the ultimate answer to the masses' problems was for Gyenlo to take control of Nyemo and implement a 'true' revolutionary government. This resonated well in rural Nyemo and within a short time Gyenlo grew rapidly in size and strength.

All of this, it should be emphasized, was occurring well before Trinley Chödrön, the young nun from Nyemo, became involved and it would certainly have continued without her presence. This was not a movement that concerned religion or nationalism; it was a campaign by Gyenlo to defeat their rival faction and an attempt by a wider population to rid themselves of what they saw as excessive extractions by corrupt and avaricious authorities. Gyenlo's tactics were timely and effective and secured them many new recruits, including a young nun named Trinley Chödrön.

---

[27] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

## THE NUN JOINS GYENLO

In 1968 Trinley Chödrön was thirty years old. Her family, Bejang, had been a lower middle *treba* (taxpayer) family in Phusum village,which had belonged to the Lhalu aristocratic family. In the old society, she had been a nun in a local Kagyupa nunnery called Thaser, where she lived with an elderly nun who was her teacher. She was able to read a few simple prayer texts, but not much more.[28] As for the rest of Tibet's vast monastic and nun population, Trinley Chödrön's life underwent a total transformation in 1959, following the implementation of the Democratic Reforms. At this time monks and nuns were forced to attend reeducation classes where the basic ideas of Buddhism were ridiculed and denigrated and where monastic leaders and lamas were humiliated and struggled against. Within months, almost all the common monks and nuns returned to their villages to start new lives. Trinley Chödrön was among them.

Trinley Chödrön, however, did not adjust well to these forced changes. Unlike many nuns and monks, she did not marry, continuing to see herself as a nun. She lived in her former nun's house together with her teacher, coming down to the village during the day to work in the fields. A relative of hers says that she was angry and depressed about these events. She abhorred the destruction of the monastic system, often asking rhetorically why the new officials had to do such things. Her isolation increased when her teacher died a few years after the Democratic Reforms began in 1959.[29]

The onset of the Cultural Revolution's 'Destroy the Four-Olds' campaign in Nyemo pushed Trinley Chödrön over the line. Her brother says that she was incensed at both the Red Guards and activists for their attacks on religion and at the new rules preventing all manifestations of private religious practice and became more despondent and disoriented. She was also agitated because her own family's class status had been reassessed negatively from middle farmer (Tib. *shingdring*) to upper middle farmer (Tib. *shingdring gongma*) without justification, and because Red Guards had ransacked their house searching for religious texts and objects.[30] The impact of these events appears to have unbalanced her and she was

[28] Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01 Nyemo, Tibet Auonomous Region, China.

[29] Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Auonomous Region, China.

[30] Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

soon acting as if mentally disturbed. Her younger brother recalled that:

> She was like a crazy person [Tib. *myon ma*]. Sometimes she did not eat food. Sometimes she drank filthy water that was in puddles on the road or in a mud pit. Sometimes she did not stay in her home but spent nights alone up in the mountains.[31]

A neighbour in her village said similarly:

> She had mental problems (Tib. *sems ma thang ba*), and lived by herself for about three years. She used to yell and scream at the people who were walking back and forth on the path [near where she was staying].[32]

In this state of mind, Trinley Chödrön began to have fantastic dreams and hallucinatory visions of people and deities. She saw strange cloud formations with Buddhas and the Dalai Lama, and talked of birds landing to bring her messages. One neighbour recalled:

> She would say that she saw something and [we saw her] talking with people who normal people could not see and hear. There were many different stories [she told] but it was crazy talk. It was all hard to believe. She had been doing this for several years.[33]

It is not absolutely clear when Trinley Chödrön's immersion in this world of hallucinatory visions and conversations moved to a new level but at some point she began to believe that gods were possessing her.[34] Her younger brother, who was then living with her, recalled how this began. After Trinley Chödrön had been acting strangely for what he thinks was about a year, she became very sick and so weak that she could hardly walk or do housework. At this time she was acting as if a god was trying to possess her, but she was unable to accommodate the god and this, she felt, was why she had become so ill.

---

[31] Interview, 2000, OR.0060.03, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[32] Interview, 2006, OR.0351.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[33] Interview, 2002, OR.0351.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[34] These reports appear similar to the classic symptoms for schizophrenia which often has its onset in late adolescence or early adulthood, as the result of some trauma or a situation where a person is overwhelmed by problems and can no longer fulfill his or her ascribed role (Rogler and Hollingshead 1965). In Trinley Chödrön's case, however, not enough is known about her behaviour for us to pursue this further.

In the Tibetan religious tradition, being possessed is very different from having a dream or vision, since going into trance follows a culturally scripted process in which the body shakes and the person huffs and puffs (symbolizing the god entering the body). Gods can spontaneously possess a human, but this also can be controlled so that the person can summon the god to possess him or her for short periods of time. Such people are traditionally called *lhapenyen* or *lhaba* (Tib. *lha phebs mnyan; lha pa*)—in English, mediums.[35]

Trinley Chödrön was unable to manage her possession, so she went secretly to see a lama who not only encouraged her to become a medium but also performed the key *tsago che* (Tib. *rtsa sgo phye*) ritual, which allows a person to accept and control his or her possession by deities. After this, she was able to go into trance, although at first she did so only alone in her house.[36]

Mediums played an important role in traditional Tibetan society linking the realm of the gods to the realm of humans, and were frequently consulted at times of illness and other major decisions; and they still are. At the highest level, there were official State Mediums, such as Nechung, who were consulted by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government at difficult times, but oracles were also found throughout the countryside where many hundreds of villagers—male and female—functioned part-time as religious mediums able to summon deities to possess them. In this tradition, the god who is invoked takes such complete control over the medium's body that the medium is not supposed to remember anything the god said after the god leaves and he/she comes out of trance. Mediums lead normal lives when not in trance—they are not perceived as mentally ill or unbalanced because they can summon deities into their bodies. However, in Trinley Chödrön's case, her mental illness continued. In fact, as a number of interviewees explained, initially that is why she was allowed to practise as a medium during the Cultural Revolution. Her brother said, "At first, when this started, neither people from our village (Phusum) nor the officials from our *xiang* paid her any attention since they considered her to be a crazy person."[37] Another villager also recalled:

---

[35] The term 'oracle' is used interchangeably in the academic literature.
[36] Interview, 2007, OR.0060.05, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[37] Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

> She was wearing a fox fur hat and had a small bow hanging from her neck … People said she was mad. It was the time of the Cultural Revolution and people were not allowed to burn incense and all statues had been destroyed, but the nun continually burned incense and no one stopped her doing so because of her madness.[38]

Meanwhile, in April 1968, she went with several Tibetans from her village to join Gyenlo at their Headquarters in Nyemo. One of the movement's officials explained what happened:

> In early April 1968 … Trinley [a male villager from the nun's village] came to my home and told me that he had a female relative who was a poor peasant. He told me that this woman sometimes appeared to be mad, but she wanted to join our organization. I asked Trinley how serious her mental problem was. Trinley said she was not seriously mad so I said she could join the organization.[39]

The villagers then said that this woman wanted a Gyenlo armband (Ch. *xiu zhang*) but were told that there were no extra armbands available at that time. The villagers, however, knew she was determined so they continued to press the Gyenlo leaders and ultimately one of them gave them his own armband to give to her.[40] At this point the Gyenlo leaders had no idea who this woman was, let alone having any thoughts of using her to help their fight against Nyamdre. She was just another village recruit. Consequently, in April 1968, a disturbed nun became a member of a leftist revolutionary faction, which was fighting to take control of Nyemo county from a rival revolutionary masses' faction. In the following months, this seemingly incompatible relationship would intensify and ultimately lead to the confusing and bloody disturbances of 1969.

During the summer and fall of 1968 the nun's reputation for accurate prophecies in trance increased, and people from other villages started to consult her or, rather, the gods she invoked. She initially claimed she was being possessed by the Jowo Rimpoche (Tib. *jo bo rin po che*), the Shakyamuni Buddha of the Jokhang temple, and by a local mountain deity, but by the autumn of 1968 the main god possessing her was an unusual supernatural being—Ani

---

[38] Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[39] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 2. Another Chinese source gives a date of September 1968 for this, but we think the April date is correct. (Xizang zizhiqu, Xizang junqu. Zhu nimu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin, 1971)

[40] Ibid.

Gongmey Gyemo (Tib. *a ne gong ma'i rgyal mo*), the paternal aunt of King Gesar.

Trinley Chödrön's linkage with Ani Gongmey Gyemo is significant because this associated her directly with the epic story of Gesar, the famous king who descended to Tibet from the realm of the gods (Tib. *lha yul*) to wage a series of bloody wars against the demons and devils who were then enemies of Buddhism. Ani Gongmey Gyemo played an important role in Gesar's wars against the enemies of religion by advising Gesar though prophecies after he descended to the human realm. Symbolically, therefore, Trinley Chödrön was now assuming the persona of a goddess famous for being proactive in defence of Buddhism. At this early stage, however, she was not trying to recruit members for a militant movement to restore Buddhism and nor did being possessed by Ani Gongmey Gyemo change Trinley Chödrön's positive views about Gyenlo and Mao, who she continued to praise and support. For example, one Gyenlo leader said:

> In the summer of 1968, Zhou Longquan came to my house and said to me, "Do you know that recently a lot of people have been to Phusum to worship the deity? It used to be done secretly, but now it's open. Do you know the nun? She is young. She publicizes the thoughts of Chairman Mao."[41]

Consequently, at the same time that Gyenlo in Nyemo was taking concrete steps to wrest power from Nyamdre, Trinley Chödrön was transforming herself from a simple oracle in a tiny village into a figure embodying the supernatural identity of a militant 'defender of the faith.'

At this juncture, although Gyenlo had not tried to enlist the help of the nun, Zhang Yongfu was aware of her growing reputation among Tibetan villagers. Not wanting to make Gyenlo less appealing to these same villagers by criticizing the 'superstition' she obviously represented, he began to say that Gyenlo supported the freedom of people to worship, or not worship, the Buddha and that Gyenlo placed no restrictions on the practice of Buddhism. Zhang also told Gyenlo's representatives in the villages that they should protect the nun and show her respect.[42]

---

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

## GYENLO'S AUTUMN OFFENSIVE

In October 1968, as county officials started to convene meetings to arrange the grain collections for that year, Zhang Yongfu took this as an opportunity to destroy Nyamdre's control by inducing Gyenlo villagers to disrupt their meetings and refuse to pay their grain quotas. A Gyenlo leader explained what he told people at this time:

> "Are you still sleeping? You should make use of this meeting and send some representatives there to post big-character posters." I suggested that it was high time that they had started the rebellion. They then sent several hundred people to the meeting in the name of putting up big-character posters. Those people beat comrade Phuntso, the vice-secretary of the *xiang* party committee. They also attacked and stopped the meeting. The disturbance was quite serious … Eventually, no surplus grain was sold to the government.[43]

Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung had more ambitious plans, which included attacking the Nyamdre officials in the county seat later in November, but they were worried about whether their Gyenlo villager supporters would lose their nerve at the last minute. During one conversation about this, the nun's name arose. As one Gyenlo activist recalled:

> On 11 November 1968, Zhang Yongfu said to me, "If we attack the county now, our force is a little bit too weak and we may lose the fight." Then Rangjung had an idea: "Let the nun from Phusum perform a medium's trance for people from Angang to bolster their courage." Zhang Yongfu said, "Even though this is superstition, we do not need to worry too much about that now."[44]

That is precisely what happened two weeks later, on the afternoon of 26 November, when over 300 villagers from Angang district arrived in Phusum. As Zhang had feared, some of these villagers were expressing reluctance to attack the county seat. The nun then went into trance, wearing Tibetan medium's clothing and the Gyenlo armband, and exhorted them to act, as the following account relates:

> "Comrades in arms, you should make up your mind to attack the county. I am the God who supports your Gyenlo and promises there will be no casualties. I will become manifest as an eagle and join the battle. All the people wearing white woollen *chuba*s [the traditional

[43] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 1.
[44] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 2.

> Tibetan village dress] should unite together to drive out the people wearing blue and yellow clothes [cadre and PLA]."[45] And she said that the seeds planted in Spring have already ripened in Autumn [it is time for our attack]… She also distributed blessed barley as protective talismans to the people who were going to attack the county. The lama Chamba Tenzin also offered barley talismans and said that the talisman could protect you from bullets if you cast them in the direction of the gunfire.[46]

The trance comments made by the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had the effect that Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu desired and the assembled villagers set aside their fears and attacked the county seat. They were completely victorious, as one Gyenlo activist recalled:

> Carrying swords and slingshots, we fought in Nyemo County. The masses rose up and the cadres lost. The masses seized the cadres and beat them up … and locked up the cadres in Nyemo *xiang*. … We made them naked and beat them up. … We kept them and made them confess their wrongdoing.
>
> However, we couldn't keep them all the time because we would have had to give them food and we didn't have the power of the Communist Party. After that, we just had to set them free. They ran away to Lhasa. … At that time we were pure Gyenlo. *We were saying that we wanted to overthrow the people in power in the Party but we were not really going against the Party itself.* At that time the matter between the factions had not been settled.[47]

As a result of this, most Nyamdre cadres fled to Lhasa or were marginalized, and Gyenlo became the dominant revolutionary force in the countryside. The November action was also a victory for the villagers, since they did not have to give the state the heavy grain extractions that were scheduled. Chinese records reveal that in 1968 almost 2.25 million *jin* of grain remained with the farming households that would otherwise have been forcibly sold or 'donated' to the government.[48]

---

[45] Yellow and blue were commonly used in a derogatory way throughout Tibet to refer to the PLA and cadres, either with reference to their clothing or as a short-hand for 'yellow dogs' and 'blue pigs'.

[46] Xizang zi zhiqu, Xizang junqu. Zhu nimu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin, 1971.

[47] Interview, 2002, OR.380.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. (emphasis added)

[48] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 'Guanyu 1969 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao)', 1974, ms.

The attack was also a tremendous success for the nun. Although she had not accompanied and led the attack, her prophecies and promises of supernatural protection had proven accurate, since no one had been injured. Faith in her soared and, as we will see, many villagers started to believe that the nun had supernatural powers of her own.

However, although the November 1968 victory was a great success, Zhang Yongfu was still worried about the county's Department of Armed Forces and Military Squadron, which represented a potential reason for Nyamdre to launch a counter-attack.[49] The next goal for Gyenlo, therefore, was to solidify its position against future attacks by eliminating these units and creating its own 'revolutionary' army and administration.

## CREATING 'GYENLO'S ARMY OF THE GODS'

Between 7 and 13 January 1969, Gyenlo held a meeting to analyze the successful November operation and discuss their next steps. One major issue was whether to acknowledge the role of the nun in the November operation and, more importantly, whether Gyenlo should continue to incorporate her into their future plans. Some activists said she had played a critical role, for example:

> We people from Phusum were very brave because we had our God, Gongmey Gyemo, and she told us that we would not fail and would win the battle in about an hour. She told us no one would get injured in this combat because we had Gongmey Gyemo behind us. We won this combat not because we were capable, but because Ani Gongmey Gyemo was supporting us.[50]

Other Gyenlo leaders, however, were reluctant to include praise for the nun in their summary report, since they were a revolutionary group and should not be highlighting the fact that they had used religion or superstition, and would use it again in the future.

---

[49] The Department of Armed Forces was part of the county government organization and was responsible for organizing and training the people's militia. Usually there were only a few military officials working in the department. The Military Squadron was a unit of regular troops based in the county. Its officials and soldiers were regular troops under the direct charge of the TAR military headquarters, not under the county government.

[50] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 2, 1974: 6-7.

Ultimately, however, the pragmatism of Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung won out and the meeting agreed to credit the role the nun had played in their 27 November success and to use her further in the future attacks they were planning.[51]

The meeting produced four documents which set out a new organizational structure for the county and a quasi military force which would be ready "to fight at the first call and be sure of winning every fight."[52] One of the representatives from Phusum suggested this new force be called the 'Army for Defending Buddhism' (Tib. *bstan srung dmag*). However, this name not only connoted a purely religious goal but had been used in the 1959 uprising, so most of the representatives disliked it. Another, therefore, suggested that the new headquarters should be called a politically correct name, the Gyenlo Headquarters of Farmers and Herdsmen (Ch. *nong mu siling bu*). However, Rangjung disagreed and suggested that it should be called Gyenlo's Army of the Gods (Tib. *gyen log lha dmag*; Ch. *zaofan shenjun*). Zhang Yongfu agreed with Rangjung, saying:

> The success of 27 November came from the thoughts of Chairman Mao and the efforts of the nun. Why can't we allow the people to call this organization Gyenlo's Army of the Gods? I think we should respect the creativity of the masses. Maybe you are afraid, but I am not.[53]

Wu Lide, a Han cadre and Gyenlo leader, agreed, commenting on the power of religion in Tibetan society:

> Tibet is thoroughly imbued with superstition (Tib. *mongde*; *rmongs dad*; Ch. *mixin*), so whereas the thoughts of Chairman Mao are our mental atom bomb (Tib. *samlö dütren bande*; *bsam blo rdul phran 'bar mdel*; Ch. *jingshen yuanzi dan*), for Tibetans, religious superstition is their mental atom bomb.[54]

Yet another said, more cynically:

> Zhang Yongfu's idea is understandable. This name came from the masses. It will be fine if we use it, but we should not disseminate it in public. The current situation requires us to seize political power at all levels so we cannot separate ourselves from the masses at this crucial time. So we can make use of the nun at present and arrest her after the

[51] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 2, 1974.
[52] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 2, 1974.
[53] Nimu wenti fucha zu. 1974.
[54] Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974: 7.

> Revolutionary Committee (Ch. *geming weiyuanhui*) is founded. Zhang Yongfu said that this nun has power and I agree with him.[55]

In the end, Gyenlo General Headquarter in Nyemo decided to use the name 'Gyenlo's Army of the Gods' inside the organization and with the villagers, but 'Headquarter of Farmers and Herdsmen' in public and with higher levels. Zhang Yongfu was selected as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Gods, and Rangjung and Tsesum, the Tibetan head of Nyemo *xiang*, were appointed as the Deputy Commanders-in-Chief, along with several others.

In the months that followed Gyenlo consolidated its power, marginalizing the Nyamdre grassroot level officials, and prepared for an attack on the offices of the county's Military Squadron and Department of Armed Forces. It now maintained close ties with Trinley Chödrön through Rangjung, who was organizing and preparing its villager members for the military operations against the county seat.

While this was unfolding, the nun's situation took a dramatic turn.

## Gesar's Warrior-Heroes and the Nun's Manifesto

As mentioned earlier, belief in Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo soared following the 27 November victory and increasing numbers of people came to visit her to consult the god and receive her blessing. At the same time, there was a blurring of the identities of the medium and the goddess, as the nun changed from being a mortal vehicle for Ani Gongmey Gyemo to being her actual embodiment. Many local people started talking about her as if she herself had supernatural powers, as the following comments by two Nyamdre members illustrate. One said:

> At that time, people were exaggerating and saying that the nun was able to tell them what they were thinking. I didn't get a chance to go there [to see her] but at that time, people were saying that when they took the nun some kind of gift or offering like tsamba, flour, or money, she was able to tell them what they had thought when they were preparing the gift. For example, she would say, "When you were preparing this gift, you were thinking that you didn't really want to

[55] Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974: 7.

> give this gift-offering to me and you left the bigger gift at home and took a smaller one." At that time the nun was really famous.[56]

A second recalled:

> I thought I should try hard to do the things that they ordered me to do, otherwise I would place myself in a bad situation. At that time the nun said she knew what every individual was doing both during the day and when the person returned home because she could transform herself into the body of a mouse and visit households. Because of this, even though there were no outside persons in my home, we did not dare to talk about our real feelings. We were afraid she could learn our feelings. I had to talk with my wife using very low whispers when we needed to discuss some secret things. Ane Gongmey Gyemo said the leaders were not honest and because of her accusations many *xiang* leaders were beaten by people. One leader of this *xiang* was attacked with knives. She indicated that the leaders were collecting the grain even though people did not have grain to hand in and they were not honest about it.[57]

A third villager more succinctly commented on the nun's powers, "We were thinking that the nun could foresee future things."[58]

This environment produced a surprising effect, a kind of mass 'Gesar hysteria' in which other Tibetan villagers were now spontaneously possessed by deities, who they identified as the main generals or 'warrior-heroes' (Tib. *dpa' bdud*) of the Gesar tale, including Bala, Demba, Pehar Gyepo, Shempa and Jangtru Yulha.[59] These were confirmed by Ani Gongmey Gyemo, who did the equivalent of the *tsago che* ritual for them. These new medium warrior-heroes were different from the village Gyenlo members in that they were completely committed to Ani Gongmey Gyemo and Gesar's campaign to defend Buddhism. It is not certain how many of these warrior-hero mediums appeared, but Chinese sources say there were a total of fifty-four. Certainly there were fifteen and twenty major ones, and it was they who carried out most of the subsequent killings and mutilations.

By the start of 1969, therefore, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had made a significant transition in that she was now

---

[56] Interview, 2002, OR.0367.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[57] Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[58] Interview, 2002, OR.0374.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

[59] Bala (Tib. *dpa' la*), Demba (Tib. *ldan pa*), Pehar Gyepo (Tib. *pe har rgyal po*), Shempa (Tib. *shan pa*), Jangtru Yulha (Tib. *'jang phrug g.yu lha*).

surrounded by a small, but militant, group of committed followers, who saw themselves as mediums for the great battle heroes of King Gesar. However, this was not merely an imagined world of storybook figures and symbols—Tibetans believed that Gesar and the other warrior heroes actually existed in the realm of the gods, so those who believed that these mediums were genuine, now believed that Gesar's warrior-heroes were returning to the realm of humans to support and be led by Ani Gongmey Gyemo.

It should not be forgotten, nevertheless, that Trinley Chödrön was still operating under the overall protective umbrella of Zhang Yongfu and Gyenlo Headquarters, who continued to support and protect her. This was still the Cultural Revolution and what was occurring could clearly have been terminated as one of the 'Four Olds' had Gyenlo's leaders wanted to do so. However, given their end-justifies-the-means tactics, Zhang Yongfu, Rangjung and the other leaders felt it was not in their interest to do so before the big attack against the army forces. They understood the importance of religious figures in Tibetan culture and thought it would help them if the villagers saw her as a leader. They were willing to let this new phase develop because Trinley Chödrön was less of a threat to Gyenlo than might have been the case had she been strong-willed or decisive. Her brother recalled that she normally followed what others said:

> She was insane and did things that made no sense (Tib. *khungs lung 'di lung med pa*) and she always followed other people. When we served her a cup of tea, she drank it. When other people came, she would follow whatever they said. [60]

She was also not an active leader. Throughout this period she never gave public speeches and was not available to the masses for meetings, discussions and the like. With the exception of actual trances, all interactions were done through her closest advisors, such as Rangjung or the medium warrior-heroes. One Phusum man commented on this with respect to the medium warrior-heroes, who were giving orders regarding who to maim and kill:

> Her representatives would make speeches. The nun herself would not say anything. It was very hard for us to see her. Mostly those people who said they had great faith in the nun would call meetings and make speeches. There were several important persons who were given

[60] Interviews, 2000 and 2005, OR.0060.01, Nyemo, Tibet Auonomous Region, China.

> names of heroes from the Ling Gesar Epic. They were the people who made speeches. They would say this and that was the nun's order. They were people who also made decisions about who had faith in the nun and who did not, and who should be seized and who should not.[61]

Trinley Chödrön was, therefore, someone that Gyenlo felt could be manipulated and controlled through Rangjung, who was now staying in Phusum most of the time.

Meanwhile, Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu went ahead with their plans for a major attack on Nyemo, setting a date for June. Trinley Chödrön, who was informed of this, then issued a wild, rambling letter, which Ani Gongmey Gyemo dictated while the nun was trance. It was a combination of an announcement of, and rationalization for, the coming attacks. The Chinese translation of this statement exists and is the only concrete evidence we have of what the nun was thinking at this time. Unfortunately, much of the translation makes little sense, in part because it contains religious symbolism, which may have been mistranslated into Chinese, but more likely because it reflects the nun's confused imaginary world and the garbled nature of the original speech.

In this statement, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo declared that Nyemo was now a place ruled by the gods and religion, but she also made a distinction between the material world and the moral/spiritual world of culture and religion. In the latter sphere, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo was to be responsible, but in the former, Mao was responsible. It also said that something major would occur in June. However, there was nothing in the statement about driving out the Han Chinese or independence and, in fact, it emphasised Trinley Chödrön's link with the state, by saying that Mao had instructed her to come here.[62] Her brother also recalled her talking about Mao, telling him that, "Chairman Mao will not treat us badly; he is an incarnation of Manjusri. It is the internal [people] who are the worst." "At that time," he continued, "I told her that the internal [people] are not worse and she should not say that."[63] However, Trinley Chödrön did not listen to him. The nun wanted to destroy the 'demons' and 'devils' in Nyemo.

In early June 1969, soon after dictating her statement, the nun and her medium warrior-heroes began to identify and punish individuals

[61] Interview, 2002, OR.0029.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[62] The entire letter is cited in Goldstein et al. (in press).
[63] Interview, 2005, OR.0060.03, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

she considered to be ‘inner’ enemies. What ensued was an orgy of killing, maiming and mutilation. The attacks were mostly aimed at the grassroot cadres who had implemented democratic reforms or helped the Chinese in the 1959 revolt, but also included individuals who were challenging her authenticity and those against whom she, or those around her, had some specific grudge from the past. In some cases all three coalesced.

We have many firsthand interviews of what transpired, but the following recollection reveals how capricious and feared the nun and her warrior-heroes had become to many villagers on the eve of the attack on the county seat:

> A. Later on they were saying that she was going into trance and she was performing miracles. … So since people were saying she was doing great things, I went there. I had [also] heard that the deity [the nun in trance] was chopping off people’s hands.
> Q: Were you afraid?
> A: Yes, I was afraid, so I went there [to show support]. …
> Q: Did you go alone?
> A: I went with many people.…
> Q: When you first saw the nun, what was she like?
> A: She was wearing the costume of a medium. She was wearing a yellow satin *chuba*. … We requested that she bless us by putting her hand on our heads, otherwise we didn’t have anything to do. There were many people with me.
> Q: Did she ask you anything, like where are you from?
> A: She didn’t ask anything. But she gave the appearance that she liked Gyenlo.
> Q: How?
> A: She was saying that Gyenlo will be victorious.
> Q: What did she say?
> A: She said, “Gyenlo will win the victory. However, you should be careful.” Actually, we didn’t have anything to be careful about.
> Q: When you got there, were you able to meet the nun right away or did you have to request it through other people?
> A: We didn’t need to go through other people. We had to go inside slowly. There were people like Bala [the medium warrior-hero] who were carrying swords and standing near the door.
> Q: How many people were there carrying swords?
> A: There were about four people standing there.
> Q: Did all of them have swords in their hands?
> A: Yes, and they had put swords through their belts.
> Q: Was the nun alone inside?
> A: Yes.

> Q: What was the condition of the nun's house?
> A: The house was not so big. It was small.
> Q: At that time did you ask her to go into trance?
> A: She was going into trance. It was just like going to a temple for worship. The oracle was asked to go into trance by the public so individuals didn't have anything to do. After they said that the trance was over, then we had to leave.
> Q: At that time, were you afraid of getting your hands cut off?
> A: Yes. That actually happened to a Nyamdre person who came with us that day. … They tied him up all day long.
> Q: How did they know he was Nyamdre? Did he tell them that he was Nyamdre?
> A: Probably the secret was revealed by other people.
> Q: How did they seize him?
> A: They seized him immediately. They had three stakes in the ground and they made him lie on his stomach and tied his legs to two stakes, and tied his hands to one stake. Then they placed a chopping board and a small axe near his hands. At that time, I was so scared that I almost fainted.
> Q: What did he say?
> A: He didn't say anything. When they beat him with the blunt side of the swords, he was hopping up and down. Bala was acting as if he were crazy. He was rubbing his sword on his hands, showing that he was going to cut the hands of the person who was lying there. At that moment I thought that something bad was going to happen.
> Q: Weren't any of the other people asking for mercy?
> A: Who would dare to ask for mercy? After it was finished, all the people went back home. … I heard that in the evening they cut off his hand and put it in the pouch of his *chuba*.
> Q: Since he was Nyamdre, why did he go there?
> A: He went there not because he liked them but because he feared that he might lose his hand and his life if he did not. At that time people were afraid of losing their hands and lives [if they didn't go]. … People were afraid and felt they had to go there to see the nun [to show they believed in her].[64]

Another victim who lost both her hands, recalled her ordeal:

> I was five months pregnant and working as an official for the local *xiang*, but I couldn't stay there [since my father had been attacked and killed and I heard that the nun's forces also wanted to seize me]. So I took my daughter on my back and fled [with my husband] to a nomad family about four hours from my home on the other side of the

[64] Interview, 2002, OR.0335.01. Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

> mountain. I hid there for about a month and then returned when I heard that PLA troops had arrived at the county seat [since I thought it was safe]. However, on the road back we [ran into the nun's people] and were caught.
>
> They tied my husband's hands behind his back but left me untied as I was carrying my infant in my hands, but still they kicked me and were yelling at me saying, "You female demon (*dümo*; Tib. *bdud mo*), move ahead! You have to go to the 'dharma protector' (*chösung*; Tib. *chos srung*) [the nun]." They were also yelling [the war cry] "*ki hi hi*" and shooting [Tibetan] muskets and hitting people with [the back of their] swords. …When we arrived near our house, I heard some people there yelling, "Come! The demons are arriving." I was so afraid that I don't remember how I got there.
>
> … They took me to the [place they called the] slaughtering grounds to cut off my hand … They brought an axe and a wooden chopping block and put my arm on the chopping block. Their axe was not sharp so they had to hit it several times and even then they couldn't sever the hand entirely. My hand was dangling … The pain was extraordinary. … After that [a relative of mine came and] tied my arm's stump with a piece of rubber to stop the bleeding.
>
> About an hour or so later, they came back yelling that I had to come out of my house. My mother told them, "My daughter is dying", but they didn't believe her and came inside the house and said, "The nun dharma protector (*ani chösung*) told us not to leave you; and to kill you."
>
> I remember that it was a moonlit night. They said, "That axe isn't sharp; we need a sword." Then they took a long shiny sword that was very sharp and struck my other hand, cutting it off right away. I didn't feel pain. Probably it was because I was too scared. I screamed and thought I would die, and it would have been better if I had died. I couldn't stand it.
>
> … That same night they took my husband to the slaughtering ground. After tying his hands and legs to stakes, they cut off one of his legs.[65]

There were numerous incidents like this and within a three week period the nun's warrior-oracles openly killed or maimed more than twenty local Tibetans.

While this was occurring the authorities stood by and refused to intervene, as the following accounts of an investigatory team led by Zhang Yongfu illustrates:

---

[65] Interview, 2000, OR.0045.01. Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

> (Tseden Benjor from Phusum said) Two days after Lhawang Yeshe was killed in 1969 [this was the first killing], Zhang Yongfu and some other people came to Phusum *xiang* to investigate how he was killed. … I told them, "Now the female lunatic [the nun] has started killing people. Please arrest the nun and the oracle-heroes and take them to the Public Security Bureau. Otherwise, we will live in darkness in our villages." Zhang Yongfu however said, "We are not here to investigate the matter of the lunatic. So long as the female lunatic is useful to us, we can support her."
>
> (Wangchuk from Phusum said) After Lhawang Yeshe was killed … Zhang Yongfu and the three other people from Nyemo came ... I said to them, "In our *xiang* many male and female lunatics have assembled. We want to fight against the nun but we don't have even a single weapon, so our lives are in danger and what are we to do? Please arrest the nun and take her to the Public Security Bureau." Zhang Yongfu said, "It is not necessary to arrest the nun. She is just a common lunatic. We'll have trouble if we take her to the Public Security Bureau. So don't bother her. Since she is useful to us, we need to protect her."[66]

And when two *xiang* leaders went to report the killing and seek help from the military office, its political commissar, Zhang Diantong, also refused to act. Fearing a second incident like the one that had occurred in the Jokhang in June 1968 (mentioned above), if he ordered the army to suppress the nun, who he saw as part of a revolutionary faction, he criticized these village leaders for engaging in factionalism and told them to go back home immediately.[67]

With the blood flowing and the remaining authorities unwilling to intervene, the nun and her medium warrior-heroes must have felt invincible.

At the same time as this was occurring, Gyenlo Headquarters sought to further motivate its members by holding a commemoration ceremony on the anniversary of the 7 June 1968 Jokhang killings. At this ceremony, Zhang Yongfu had representatives from the villages stand in silent tribute for those Gyenlo members killed in Lhasa and then made a speech that roundly criticized the PLA's mistakes. He ended by leading the attendees in yelling slogans such as: "Avenge the martyrs!" and "Blood debts must be paid in blood!"[68] The idea of revenge had already been raised, a month or so earlier, when Gyenlo

[66] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.
[67] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.
[68] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.

Headquarters in Lhasa sent a dance troupe to Nyemo to perform a play in which the army was severely criticized for the Jokhang killings.

## THE ATTACKS ON BAGOR QU AND NYEMO XIAN

By the end of May 1969 Gyenlo and Trinley Chödrön were operating in the countryside with no restraints. However, they were still limited by the presence of the Department of Armed Forces and the Military Squadron in Nyemo county, as well as by a squad of PLA troops from Lhasa, who had recently come to Bagor to undertake propaganda work aimed at persuading villagers to end the factional violence.[69] Gyenlo, therefore, set out to destroy these obstacles in a new round of attacks. The first was a strike against the military propaganda unit in Bagor. Zhang and Rangjung set the plan in motion on 9 June.

On that day Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung called a meeting in Nyemo *xiang* for Gyenlo's village representatives[70] and instructed them to go home and get their weapons ready for the coming fight. On 11 June the Gyenlo representatives from several villages took their spears, swords and guns to Trinley Chödrön and asked her to go into trance and bless their weapons. At this audience the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo said:

> It is the second time I have come to Tibet to liberate this region [the first apparently being at the time of Gesar]. You should fight hard to defend religion. From now on, all power belongs to the Buddha.[71]

Rangjung hoped to kill the PLA troops in Bagor and seize their weapons, which he planned to use immediately in the main attack on Nyemo county's military offices. The attack would also serve to avenge the Jokhang killings and would send a message that if the military did not stay neutral, Gyenlo would use its power to fight them.

On the evening of 12 June he led his forces, including the medium warrior-heroes, to Bagor, arriving very early the next morning.[72]

---

[69] Interview, 2002, OR.0300.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[70] The Gyenlo members in each village selected their own representatives.
[71] Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 5, 1974.
[72] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

Trinley Chödrön remained in Phusum. On the nun's instructions, the warrior-heroes were wearing white *khata* ceremonial scarves slung over their torsos and fastened to their hair, which was tied in a top knot, their version of Gesar's garb.[73] After burning incense to the gods, the attackers quickly broke into the PLA propaganda troop's building and immediately set out to kill everyone there. One Tibetan attacker recalled the events:

> We then broke into the compound and reached the third floor, Rangjung was on the second floor. He saw the cadre named Danden Dorje there, so he slashed at him and almost chopped his hand off. Danden Dorje was trying to run away, but was stopped by Tashi Rapden (the medium warrior-hero Jangtru Yulha), who slashed him once again. Danden Dorje fell down but did not die right away. When some of us hesitated to kill him Tashi Rapden yelled at us saying, "I can see that some (Gyenlo) representatives are not honest. They are two-faced and bad elements. I will kill anybody who dares to be dishonest." Saying this, he pushed people near him with his sword. I didn't have any weapons, so I picked up a heavy stick and used it to beat Danden Dorje six times on the head. Representative Wangchuk Rapden from Nyemo *xiang* then found a flat grinding stone from a mill and pounded Danden Dorje's head with it, killing him.
>
> I went to another room and found that Tashi Rapden, Lhundrup Wanggye and people from Bargor had already killed six PLA soldiers. Rangjung asked me to search their bodies for weapons and other PLA stuff. I took some cigarettes, candies, and a flashlight. Later, Purbu and Karma Wangdü came into the room. … Rangjung then held a meeting and said, "Send people to every *xiang* telling them that we have won the battle in Bargor. Ask them to burn incense to welcome us. We then went to the nun's place in Phusum.[74]

Gyenlo did not, however, capture any guns, since the PLA's leaders had not armed these troops, fearing precisely that Gyenlo might try to steal them.[75] The Army of the Gods, therefore, came away empty-handed, despite having killed fourteen PLA soldiers and eight cadres. Gyenlo suffered no casualties.

The next day, 14 June, Rangjung led a force of about 800 villagers to attack Nyemo. At the same time, he sent other forces to block roads and ferry ports to prevent reinforcements from reaching Nyemo. The nun again remained in Phusum. The villagers charged

---

[73] Interview, 2002, OR.0310.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[74] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.
[75] Interview, 2002, OR.0300.01, Nyemo,Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

the gate of the military squadron's building, trying to get inside the compound, where their superior numbers would have given them the edge in hand-to-hand combat as had been the case in Bagor. Initially the PLA fired into the air and at some of their horses to try to frighten the attackers off, but when no-one was hit it only reinforced the villagers' belief in the supernatural power of the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo to protect them and they continued to try to break down the compound's gate. At this point a Gyenlo attacker threw an improvised bomb onto the roof of the building causing considerable damage. The PLA troops responded by opening fire on the attackers, killing a number of them instantly. In a matter of minutes the attack was over.[76] Gyenlo's Army of the Gods scattered, the leaders returning to Phusum, while most of the common followers returned to their homes to make defensive preparations and wait to see what would happen. One fighter explained his role as a lookout:

> On 16 and 17 June they [Gyenlo leaders] mobilized people to go to the mountain side to watch whether the PLA was coming and to destroy the roads. At that time I didn't have the ability to destroy the roads, but I went to the mountain-side to be on watch and stayed in the mountains, watching whether the soldiers were coming or not.[77]

At this time, Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes continued to kill grassroots cadres and activists. Chinese records state that thirteen more of these were killed in Phusum and other rural areas after the defeat in Nyemo on 14 June.[78]

On 17 June reinforcements from Shigatse, Lhasa and Kongpo arrived at the county seat and from there marched to the nun's house. After several battles, Rangjung and Trinley Chödrön were separately able to flee. Rangjung was never found, but Trinley Chödrön went to a remote cave with some of her close supporters where the PLA surrounded her. The PLA troops had strict orders to capture her alive, but had been told that if she would not surrender and there was a danger of her escaping they could shoot at her, so long as they did not aim above the knees.[79] A Tibetan PLA soldier from Shigatse, who was part of the army reinforcements, recalled the attack and her subsequent capture:

[76] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 5.
[77] Interview, 2002, OR.0304.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[78] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.
[79] Interview, 2000, OR.0145.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

> They told us that the nun, Trinley Chödrön, was staying in a cave in the mountains in the inner part of Nyemo. We stayed for two days and nights on the mountain without food, watching them. … We were waiting for an order [to attack] from the Central Committee. When the order from the Central Committee came to seize them, all of us soldiers were angry and hungry and opened fire, but we shot so as not to hit them, only to scare them. …
> Q. Did they fire guns at you?
> A. They had pistols and rifles. Our deputy platoon leader was shot in the leg and fell. We attacked inside [the cave] thinking that if we die, we die, so we attacked. … We tied them very tightly and immediately took them back to the Military Area Headquarters in Lhasa that night. Our orders from the Military Area Headquarters were that we must immediately hand them over alive. We were not to kill them or let them escape.[80]

The Nyemo incident was now over. Trinley Chödrön was executed in Lhasa early the next year (the twelfth of the twelfth Tibetan month) after a large public meeting in Polingka park. Two years later, in 1971, Zhang Yongfu was given an eight year term of incarceration. Rangjung was never captured, and no one in Tibet or in exile ever heard from him again. In the end, a total of 104 Gyenlo people were punished: thirty-four were executed in Lhasa and Nyemo, twenty-eight were sentenced to incarceration, and forty-two were placed under public surveillance.[81] As for the other peasants, it was agreed that most had been duped so they were generally left alone or sent to education camps for short periods of time and then released. However, rural Tibetans in Nyemo paid a heavy economic price since the government made everyone pay both what they owed in grain taxes from 1968, as well as the new taxes for 1969.

## CONCLUSION

The Nyemo disturbance was not a spontaneous Tibetan nationalistic uprising against the Chinese ‘oppressor’. Nor was it a revolt aimed at creating an independent Tibet. On the contrary, it was the result of a careful strategy orchestrated by Maoist revolutionaries, Gyenlo, to seize control of its county from a rival revolutionary organization,

[80] Interview, 2000, OR.0145.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
[81] Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

Nyamdre. Gyenlo leaders in Nyemo, led by the Chinese cadre Zhang Yongfu, set out to win over the Tibetan masses and then organize them to attack those in power, its enemy Nyamdre. To accomplish this, Gyenlo adopted a pragmatic strategy, which played to the widespread anger felt by rural Tibetans over the excessive sales grain obligation and their fears of the impending collectivization of agriculture. Gyenlo's rallying cry of eighteen *khe* of grain per person and their opposition to communes resonated well amongst the peasantry at that time. It was this, and not issues of religious freedom or the anti 'Four Olds' campaign, that initially brought villagers into their fold and enabled Gyenlo to induce its recruits to attack the Nyamdre officials.

The Nyemo disturbances would not have been possible, however, had it not been for the state-sanctioned chaos that Mao Zedong had unleashed in 1966 with the Cultural Revolution. This created a climate in which conflict and violence could flourish, as long as it was 'revolutionary', that is targeted at cleansing the party. Mao had called for the revolutionary masses to bombard party headquarters and destroy reactionaries and capitalist-roaders who had sneaked into the party, and this is what Gyenlo claimed it was seeking to accomplish. Under the banner of revolutionary struggle, mass organizations like Gyenlo and Nyamdre were empowered to do and say almost anything they wished against those in power, or against each other, particularly since the state had instructed the army and police to maintain neutrality, that is not to use their normal monopoly of force to intervene.

The ensuing factional conflicts destroyed the previously invincible unity of the party. Suddenly, all-powerful party leaders who, after 1959, had seemed the epitome of communist correctness, were being subjected to struggle sessions much like those that the aristocrats, lamas and estate managers had been subjected to at the time of Democratic Reforms. For the first time since the end of the old society in 1959, there seemed to be different points of view and different paths within the communist party and, in a broader sense, within socialist society itself. The boundaries of proper 'socialist' behaviour were no longer unitary. This new ambiguity allowed villagers, including Trinley Chödrön, to see Gyenlo not as dangerous enemies of the state, who were launching a counter-revolutionary rebellion, but rather as revolutionary stalwarts, who were attacking

the bad policies of bad officials, in accordance with the dictates of Mao Zedong.

Gyenlo's presentation of itself, therefore, gave villagers a ready-made and, to them, plausible *model of* revolutionarily acceptable revolt and at the same time a *model for* actions they could take to rid themselves of the authorities and policies they had previously had to endure silently. As Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo said in her 1969 statement:

> In the past, because we didn't have the right to speak, it was like having fire in the stomach but not daring to spew out smoke from the mouth.[82]

Now, by putting on the revolutionary armband of Gyenlo and fighting for victory over Nyamdre, that smoke could finally be spewed out of their mouths and their lives changed. Gyenlo, therefore, had shrewdly moulded revolutionary goals and rural anger into a potent agenda for action, which it dangled before the eyes of the rural farmers, asking for their help to correct a society that the Nyamdre officials had damaged. In the topsy-turvy world of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Gyenlo was able to assure villagers that Chairman Mao, himself, had pronounced it good to rebel against the power-holders who were subverting the revolution, and in Nyemo that meant against the Nyamdre cadres. Since most villagers believed the local authorities were using their power corruptly to bleed them into poverty by extracting excessive grain and forcing them into communes, this made sense and was welcome news.

The armed attacks in Nyemo, therefore, contrasted sharply with the Chushigandru (Khamba)-led uprising of 1959. In the 1959 rebellion the goal was clearly to drive the Chinese out of Tibet. By contrast, the Gyenlo campaign in Nyemo was initially aimed only at replacing the individuals in power and reversing some of the deeply unpopular post-1959 socio-economic policies. For farmers worried about not having enough grain for their families and fearful of losing their land to communes, Gyenlo, was offering them an attractive, and in their eyes attainable, alternative within China.

With the rise of the reputation of the nun, Trinley Chödrön, the Gyenlo strategy of mobilizing villagers to seize power in Nyemo took on an added religious dimension. Belief in the nun's sanctity

[82] Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 3, 1987: 7.

soared after the successful attack on November 1968, and by May–June 1969 the identities of Ani Gongmey Gyemo and Trinley Chödrön had, for many, become blurred. Trinley Chödrön had gone well beyond the normal medium's role of being simply a bodily vehicle for a deity, who would use it to answer questions about health and so forth. She had become, in the eyes of many Nyemo villagers, endowed with supernatural powers herself. Consequently, at the time of the final attacks in June 1969, the villagers were not merely following a powerful Maoist revolutionary group—which was advocating welcome changes—they were also following supernatural leadership in the person of Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo and the medium warrior-heroes of Gesar; they were fighting for the gods of Tibet, who had come to Nyemo.

In the end, therefore, while the impetus for the disturbances in Nyemo County was Gyenlo's quest to seize power from Nyamdre and would not have occurred without this, by the time of the final attacks in June there was also a major religious component, an attempt to revive the practice of Buddhism, as well as other traditional customs and practices. By June 1969 a number of religious and cultural practices prohibited during the height of the anti 'Four Olds' campaign, such as burning incense, intoning prayers and using *khata* scarves, were again openly being practised. Gyenlo's Army of the Gods was not, therefore, a movement with a single purpose or homogeneous set of goals. Not only was it operating simultaneously on two conceptual planes, but at ground level it was an amalgam of at least four different types of Tibetans who shared some, but not other, goals and priorities.

Firstly, there were those firmly committed to Gyenlo as an organization and its goal of destroying Nyamdre so as to create a new Gyenlo government in Nyemo. Like Rangjung, these were leftists imbued with strong revolutionary and factional solidarity and were the activist leaders and representatives in the villages. For them, Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes were useful, so long as they remained subservient to the broader interests of Gyenlo.

Secondly, there were those who were deeply immersed in the imagined Gesar world, who were fanatically committed to the gods. These included Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes, but also some common villagers, such as the bodyguard, quoted earlier, who had accepted the Gesar world view both intellectually and emotionally. Like those in the first category, they also sought to

depose Nyamdre and take over the county, but their social goal was strongly characterized by religious freedom. Ani Gongmey Gyemo had prophesized, “Nyemo belongs to the gods,” and they were committed to bring that to pass. This was the category that was the most fanatical about wanting to kill and maim the enemies of religion and was also a category that included individuals who harboured a mixture of pro-Tibetan and anti-government attitudes. For example, in addition to yelling slogans like “no more grain sales,” “no communes,” “freedom to trade” and “all power to the gods,” there are reports that some of the attackers also shouted more political slogans, “Tibet belongs to Tibetans.” However, at the same time, people in this category saw Gyenlo as their partner, rather than being made up of the hated ‘demons and ghosts’ who were ruling Nyemo, even though the top Gyenlo leaders were all cadres, and mostly Han Chinese.

Thirdly, some villagers initially became Gyenlo members because of the grain and commune issues, but were not deeply involved activists. After Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo emerged, they also came to believe in her powers, but saw her and Gyenlo as different faces of the same campaign. Throwing out the old Nyamdre officials, changing economic policy and restoring Buddhism were all part of the same program for them. These ‘followers’ comprised the majority of Gyenlo’s Army of the Gods.

Fourthly, there were those who had been loyal and dedicated Nyamdre members, but later felt compelled to join Gyenlo for their own safety. They did not really support either Gyenlo or the nun, but were afraid to do anything but obey Rangjung and the medium warrior-heroes. In this category there were also some villagers who had tried to stay neutral and affiliate with neither Gyenlo or Nyamdre, but toward the end felt compelled by fear to declare allegiance to Gyenlo.

Consequently, as the attacks began, there were important differences amongst the people who comprised Gyenlo’s Army of the Gods. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that the attackers were not revolting to drive the Chinese out and set up an independent country. They were fighting to empower new officials and make major changes in local rules regarding taxes, communes, the economy and religion.[83]

---

[83] Our analysis of seventy-five interviews from Nyemo, some of which were with Nyamdre members, some Gyenlo and some not involved in either, supports this. We

Returning to the original question, posed in the Introduction, we suggest that Smith, Shakya and Wang all highlight relevant aspects of the incident. However, they all also oversimplify a complex event and, in the process, inadvertently distort the historical reality. Rather than a simple dichotomy between angry Tibetans spontaneously organizing and striking back at hated Chinese, or Tibetans rising to fight for their material interests against the same Chinese, there were multiple levels and multiple actors, Tibetan and Chinese, with different motives, most of whom were using and manipulating each other for different ends.

This entire episode, moreover, was a kind of shadow play, able to exist only in an artificial world in which the state stood back and refused to use its monopoly of force to maintain order between revolutionary factions. As we saw, once the seriousness of the Nyemo problem was accepted, after the attacks of 13 and 14 June, the state concluded that the incident had gone beyond inter-factional fighting and ordered the PLA to move into Nyemo. After a brief round of fighting in Phusum and Bagor, Trinley Chödrön was captured and most villagers, feeling forsaken by their mediums and gods, took the PLA's offer of leniency and surrendered voluntarily.

We should not, however, minimize the fact that this incident was fuelled by the anger felt by many rural Tibetans at the direction that party policies had taken, not only in the realms of taxation and economic freedom, but also in those of religion and culture. It is also important to note that these villagers were not the elite class enemies of the old society trying to rise up again, but rather the rural proletarian who had been 'liberated' by the Democratic Reforms of 1959. Gyenlo understood this and worked pragmatically and brilliantly to utilize their anger and fear for its own ends, telling the villagers what they wanted to hear and offering them a powerful, and seemingly safe, way to express their anger: this was the *Gyenlo agenda*. Just as Gyenlo's leaders were angry about Nyamdre, the PLA and the Regional Party Committee and were willing to do something about it, hundreds of Tibetans were dissatisfied with their

found that thirty (40%) of the interviewees mentioned no reason for the attacks in their interviews. Of the remaining forty-five (60%), the overwhelming majority, thirty-eight (84%), mentioned a desire to eliminate such things as the grain taxes, the power-holders, the party and red guards or to restore religion as the reason. Only seven (16%) cited independence and these respondents were all Nyamdre cadres or activists who were anti-Gyenlo.

current situation, anxious about their immediate future and willing to fight to change it. The Gyenlo incident was, therefore, the product of two very different matrices of discontent, that of the Gyenlo activists, on the one hand, and that of the Tibetan villagers, on the other.

Finally, it should be emphasized that in a manner analogous to the way in which Mao had allowed the revolutionary factions to combat each other and Party elites for his own purposes, Gyenlo in Nyemo had allowed Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes to operate there for its own purposes; and just as Beijing eventually intervened and brought the conflict to an end, we believe that had Gyenlo been able to seize and hold power in Nyemo, its leftist revolutionary leaders would also have intervened to control Trinley Chödrön and prevent Nyemo from 'belonging to the gods,' as she/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had prophesized. The Tibetan villagers who marched on the county and district seats in June 1969 were pawns in the hands of Gyenlo revolutionaries, who were themselves pawns in the larger political struggles that were the creation of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution.[84]

[84] See the Epilogue in Goldstein et al. (in press) for a discussion of the connection between the Nyemo incident and the fighting in the name of Gyenlo that occurred at about the same time in other prefectures and counties in the TAR.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors want to express their thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (RZ-20585-00) for their support of the projects from which the data for this paper and book derive.

## REFERENCES

Barnett, Robert 2005. Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet. *In* J. Gyatso and H. Havnevik (eds), *Women In Tibet*. NYC: Columbia University Press.

Diemberger, Hildegard 2005. Females Oracles in Modern Tibet. *In* J. Gyatso and H. Havnevik (eds), *Women In Tibet*. NYC: Columbia University Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn 2007. *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn, Ben Jiao and Tanzen Lhundrup In press. *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet: The Nyemo Incident of 1969*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ngapo, Jigme 1988. Behind the Unrest in Tibet. *China Spring Digest*, January/February: 22–32.

Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1969 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao),* [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969], ms.

Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 1*: [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 1], ms.

Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 2*: [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 2], ms.

Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guan yu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 4*: [Report on the Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 4], ms.

Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guan yu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 5*. [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 5], ms.

Rogler, Lloyd and August Hollingshead 1965. *Trapped: families and schizophrenia.* New York: Wiley.

Smith, Warren 1996. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Tibetan Women's Association 1995. *Roof of the World: A Celebration of Culture, Peace and Protest.* Bombay: India.

Tsering Shakya 1999. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*. New York: Columbia University Press.

—— 2002. Blood in the Snows. *New Left Review*, 15: 39–60.

Wang Lixiong 2002. Reflections on Tibet. *New Left Review*, 14, March/April (translated by Liu Xiaohong and A. Tom Grunfeld).

Wei Se (Öser) 2005. Nyemo incident (http://www.tibetcul.net/blog/blog.asp?name=oser) [This blog is no longer available in China].

—— 2006. *Sha qie: Sishi nian de jiyi jinqu jingfou xia de xizang wenge, di yici gongka*i. [Forbidden Memory: Tibet During the Cultural Revolution]. Taipei: Lotus Publishers.

Xizang zizhiqu, Xizang junqu. Zhu nimu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin [Tibet Autonomous Region, Tibet Military Region, Publicity group called Mao Zedong's thought living in Nyemo]. *Gong zuo jian bao, 18* [Brief report on work, issue 18]. 1971, ms.

Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui [Committee for Collecting Materials on the Party History of the Chinese Communist Party of the Tibet Autonomous Region]. *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashiji (1949–1966)*. [Chronology of Major Events of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, 1949–66]. 1995. Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe [Tibet People's Publishing House]

Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian guanyu jiang yuan ding. [Document of the Lhasa Municipal Party Committee of the CCP, 40].*"Nimu xian wuzhang panluan" gaiding wei fan geming "sharen shijian" qing shi*. [About the request to change the previously named "armed rebellion in Nimu county" into the "counter-revolutionary killing incident".] 1987, ms.

# DISPLAY AND PERFORMANCE IN MONGOLIAN CULTURAL CAMPAIGNS

INES STOLPE[1]

The Mongolian People's Republic (1924–90) was regarded as the second socialist country in the world, following the so-called people's revolution of 1921. Mongolian governments embarked upon a series of cultural campaigns (*soyolyn dovtolgoon*),[2] with the aim of introducing essential modernist elements of a socialist order. More than mere propaganda, these campaigns aimed to create and promote new values and bring about visible changes in behaviour. They were based on a particular new concept of 'culture', to which the values of education were intrinsic, alongside the ideas of hygiene and cleanliness. Most of the associated concepts were, however, largely foreign to the rural population and a conscious process of translation was required before the new social order could be represented in everyday settings.

In such a context, one might have expected resistance and conflict on the part of those whose social order was being so radically changed. However, this paper indicates that the methods used by all actors involved—be it on the side of the campaigners or the target group—were relatively non-confrontational. Moreover, certain central concepts were ultimately internalised, to the extent that they continue to be cited, in approving terms, in the contemporary period.

---

[1] This study is part of a larger interdisciplinary research on 'Changing Representations of Social Order. Intercultural and Intertemporal Comparisons' (SFB 640) at Humboldt University Berlin (http://www.repraesentationen.de). My chapter is mainly based on field research I conducted, amounting to a total of 172 interviews, in Mongolia in 2005 and 2006. Names of interviewees remain anonymous in this contribution, unless they are public figures.

[2] The transcription of Mongolian and Russian names, terminology and sources follows the established system used in English language scholarship. Classical Mongolian is transcribed according to the internationally used Petersburg transliteration, which goes back to Isaak Jakob Schmidt. Translations from Mongolian are mine.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which consecutive cultural campaigns were managed and received, focussing particularly upon negotiations at the implementation stage. These processes are analysed using the example of a situation that illustrates a whole range of interactions between state representatives and herder families: the regular visits of peripatetic hygiene control commissions to nomadic herder camps.

## CAMPAIGNS IN THE MONGOLIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC, 1931–59

In 1921 the post-revolutionary civil war in the Soviet Union spilled over onto Mongolian territory and led to incidents which were later defined as the People's Revolution. After 1924 the country was named the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR). From the beginning strong ties were established with the Soviet Union, the so-called Elder Brother to the North (*khoid akh*). The ambivalent relationship of dependence and attraction between the Soviet Union and Mongolia was described by the Inner Mongolian anthropologist, Uradyn Bulag, as "essentialized identity" (Bulag 1998: 16). He points out that the chosen, pro-Soviet orientation has to be seen in the context of the threat posed by China:

> Mongolian nationalism during the socialist period was characterized by a tension between a desire for development towards a Soviet-oriented civilisation and the wish to develop a national culture. The traditional identity was being transformed into the concept of a socialist 'new Mongol'. (Bulag 1988: 16)

According to the central historiographic narrative of the MPR the imagined voyage through history led from dark feudalism straight into bright socialism, thus by-passing capitalism. The teleological Marxist model of salvation, describing the stages along the route that would eventually lead to communism, evoked imaginations of a perpetual journey towards a brighter future. Meanwhile, the historiographic narrative served to legitimate the multitudinous delays along that bumpy road. Although the eventual arrival at socialism was regarded as only having been achieved following collectivisation in 1961, four decades after the revolution, this goal was present as an

ideal long before that qualifying date, along with the prospect that the MPR would take a significant place in world history.[3]

Today there is a general consensus among renowned Mongolian historians that considerable social changes were eventually achieved by means of successive cultural campaigns, which proved to be even more effective than revolution or collectivisation.[4] Nevertheless, the way was not straight and policy goals changed over the decades. It took more than forty years for the Mongolian advocates of modernism to sufficiently implement the goals of cultural campaigns in order to convey their conception of a socialist order to the pastoralists. Some of this may have been due to the initial difficulty of translating the associated notions and values into comprehensible terms.

Early attempts to translate the *Communist Manifesto* from Russian into Mongolian were, for example, made in the 1920s. In the first version, the word ‘communism’ was translated as ‘the order of joint harmony.’[5] Comparably, the introductory sentence in the first complete Mongolian edition of the Manifesto, published in 1947, reads as follows: “Khii üzegdel Evropoor tenej yavna. Kommunizmyn khii üzegdel.” The literal translation is: “A hallucination is vagabonding through Europe. The hallucination of communism” (Marx & Engels 1947: 41). This slightly bizarre image illustrates not only the challenges of translation and semantic compatibility, but also the transformations that occur when representations of a new social order travel from one context to another. It was necessary to convey concepts to an audience which did not share the visions and outlook of the new order. It was, therefore, necessary to rely on existing cultural resources which could, depending on the perspective, appear alternately as a “latent threat or a promise” (Khurana and Diekmann 2007: 12). This

[3] During the decolonialisation period of the 1960s Mongolia was presented to countries of the developing world as a flagship of successful development, as the “ascent out of medieval backwardness and feudal oppression to socialism” (Shirendyb 1981: 19).

[4] Interviews with Jigjidiin Boldbaatar (27th June 2005 in Ulaanbaatar), Byambajavyn Tsenddoo (1st August 2005 in Ulaanbaatar), Chuluuny Dashdavaa (20th September 2005 in Ulaanbaatar), Mukhamadyn Khurmetkhan (25th January in Berlin) and Jamsrangyn Urangoa (16th November 2006 in Berlin).

[5] The title of the first translation by the Buriat B. Ishdorj (1925) reads: *Evkhamt namaas ukhuulan zarlakh bichig* [Agitation announcement of the party for joint harmony] (Dashjamts 1974: 214–15).

resulted in curious tensions between references to old habits and promises of change and progress.

The first cultural campaign in the MPR was introduced on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the revolution in 1931. At the time, the dissemination of 'culture' was intended to counter illiteracy, infectious diseases and a "feudal state of affairs" (Tserendorj 1976: 34ff). The print media, in particular the newspaper *Soyol-un Dobtulγ-a*, helped to introduce a Soviet-style revolutionary rhetoric, appointing Party and Youth League members as the main actors to implement political goals. Whenever infectious diseases were mentioned the disease in question was syphilis (*tembüü*). Even though scarcely described in official historiography, it is this part of the early campaigns that became prominent in the collective memory of that generation, referred to as the 'red injection' (*ulaan taria*). Not to be interpreted as an ironic allusion to indoctrination, it refers to the travelling doctors who used syringes containing a red liquid to vaccinate the population against venereal diseases, namely syphilis, during the 1930s, in order to ensure reproductive health. Statistical figures show that the population indeed started growing afterwards and several of my interviewees made remarks such as, "We are children of the red injection."[6]

It was not by chance that the first campaign concerned syphilis. Although it was widespread and did, indeed, threaten reproductive health, the disease was considered a perfect means to represent the old social order. Firstly, syphilis could be used to present the patriotic idea of an urgent need to rescue the Mongolian people. Also, the cost-free vaccination appeared to be very effective and could, therefore, be promoted as evidence that modern medicine was superior to traditional healing methods. Thus, advocates of the new order could, as the Mongolian Prime Minister Amar did during a conversation with Stalin, discredit the Buddhist healers, whose methods had failed to conquer the disease (Tsenddoo 2007: 119). Finally, syphilis was also considered to be a suitable vehicle for accusing representatives of the old order of being enemies of the new system: while Chinese traders and soldiers had been regarded as the main source of venereal diseases, from then on Buddhist monks were

[6] Interviews with D. Azzayaa (13th July 2005 in Ulaanbaatar) and Ch. Dashdavaa (20th September 2005 in Ulaanbaatar). Originally, this statement was coined by B. Dogmid, who wrote a well-known article under this title (*Bid ulaan tariany khüükhdüüd mön*) (cf. Tsenddoo 2007: 120).

portrayed as personalised epidemics. The fact that many of them, in breach of the monastic rules, did not practice celibacy provided a welcome opportunity to criticize their dubious ways of life as dissipated, greedy, superstitious and lustful in journals and theatre performances.[7] Even the campaign vocabulary, whether referring to the class enemy, to illiteracy or to combating the diseases, included words such as 'eliminate' (*arilgakh*) and 'liquidate' (*ustgakh*). This kind of code-switching, the transfer of metaphors from war and struggle into other areas, such as medicine, accompanied the importation of modernist ideas in Mongolia and elsewhere.[8] However, although the clergy, symbolising impurity, was finally 'eliminated', the disease itself resisted such politically motivated incrimination: statistics show that even between 1958 and 1960, when the putative carriers no longer existed, more than 4,000 cases of syphilis were registered (Enkhbaatar and Dondog 2003: 62).

While the old social order was officially abolished straight after the revolution, little was achieved in terms of improving the lives of ordinary people. In the following two decades smaller campaigns with clearly defined tasks were launched, mostly addressing specific target groups and focussed on economic issues, such as the Wool is Gold campaign in 1940, where members of the Youth League were asked to promote an increase in wool production. The only countrywide mass mobilisation during the 1940s was the Everything to the Front campaign, following the invasion by German troops of the USSR in 1941, which affected the entire population and lasted until the end of World War II (Boldbaatar 2003: 145). A next wave of campaigns started with the collectivisation of livestock in the mid-1950s, officially termed a 'uniting movement' (*negdeljikh khödölgöön*). Initial attempts at livestock collectivisation, in order to reorganize the pastoral economy and create a new form of social order, had to be abandoned for almost thirty years because organisational concepts and infrastructure, as well as consent, were lacking (Bawden 1968: 301–03). Changing circumstances finally led to success in collectivisation by the end of the 1950s (Sneath 2003; Lkhagvasüren 2003). The process was supported by newly-established modern institutions and services, such as schools, hospitals, post-offices, veterinary posts, shops and clubs, which not

[7] It was an open secret that even the head of the Buddhist clergy in Mongolia, the Bogd Gegeen, had been afflicted with syphilis.

[8] For examples see Clark (2000: 42).

only contributed to the creation of a socialist identity but also to the integration of mobile and sedentary lifestyles (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 209).

Towards the end of this process, in 1959, the Central Committee of the MPR passed a resolution on a second nationwide cultural campaign (*oron dayaar soyolyn dovtolgoon*), targeting illiteracy, unsanitary conditions and alcoholism, in order to prepare the Mongolian people for the fortieth anniversary of the revolution in 1961. Apart from hygiene, the main objective of post-collective cultural campaigns was modernisation. A common narrative explains how it allegedly began: in 1960, when Yu. Tsendenbal, then party chief and head of state, went to his home province in Western Mongolia (Uvs) after many years of studying abroad and residence in the Mongolian capital, he was so startled to see the conditions in which people in the countryside were living that he immediately took measures to arrange the largest cultural campaign to date. G. Dashrentsen, the journalist who spread the story in a daily newspaper, explained that Tsedenbal had viewed the 'backward' state of affairs through European eyes. Dashrentsen claimed that the cultural campaigns should be recorded in history books in golden letters because, in his view, neither the revolution nor collectivisation had a comparable impact on the change and modernisation of Mongolian society. Regardless of what one might think about Tsedenbal, the author continued, it was he who 'transformed the Mongolia of black yurts into a Mongolia of white yurts' (*Khar gertei Mongolyg tsagaan gertei bolgoson*) (Dashrentsen 2005: 3). This statement can be taken either as a metaphor for social change and modernisation or, literally, for the promotion of cleanliness. But there is an additional, underlying meaning: traditionally a white yurt represents prosperity in Mongolia.

This new wave of campaigns started at a time that, according to official Mongolian historiography, marked the intersection of the second and third stages of the cultural revolution, or, in official parlance, the stage between the "creation of the base of socialism" and the "universal dissemination of socialist culture" (BNMAU-yn Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi 1981: 51–52). The latter stage, which started in 1961, was named the "completion of the creation of socialism" (Shagdarsüren 1976). Notwithstanding the pan-socialist custom of establishing historiographic periodisation *ex post facto*, and centred on anniversaries, this time frame remains of interest for

examining social changes, as it began immediately after livestock collectivisation and coincided with the MPR's accession to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA)—or Comecon—in 1962. During the following seven years, 95.1% of Mongolia's foreign trade was with other CMEA members. (Harke and Dischereit 1976: 10)

## CHANGING CONCEPTS OF CULTURE AND PURITY

As many of my interviewees pointed out, the term 'cultural campaign' in the Mongolian context should not be associated with the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China. Instead, according to B. Tsenddoo, a young historian and journalist working on this topic, the campaigns should be understood as a means of introducing progress (*devshilt*) in the context of modernisation. During our interview he pointed out that in the early twentieth century "a new concept of culture" was introduced into Mongolia. He described these comprehensive changes as *soyoloos irgenshild*, literally 'from culture to civilisation'. (Tsenddoo 2005, 2007) He explained his choice of terminology by emphasizing that culture had, of course, existed before, but that there had been almost no modern civilisation. What did Tsenddoo implicitly refer to when he mentioned "a new concept of culture"?

During socialism, the Mongolian word for 'culture' (*soyol*) had two main connotations: first, education in a broader sense—including art and entertainment—(*soyol bolovsrol khümüüjil*) and second, hygiene (*ariun tsever*). The first connotation has been an integral element of the traditional concept of 'being cultivated' (*soyoltoi*) and the word 'culture' usually appeared in conjunction with the term 'enlightenment' (*soyol gegeerel*). But the original meaning of this term was fundamentally different from the European concept, as the related word *gegeen* connotes 'light/wise/illuminated' and stems from Buddhist terminology. Under socialism the term *gegeerel* changed in meaning and took on the connotation of 'profane education' as well as 'enlightenment' in the sense of secularisation (Stolpe 2005: 12). The second connotation of culture as hygiene was fostered by the ideal of a socialist lifestyle. While

education promoted inner purity, hygiene was directed at outer cleanliness.[9]

Linguists of the Terminological Commission of the MPR, founded in 1930, whose task was the creation of a consistent new terminology, were faced with the dilemma that the extension of the vocabulary had to employ established Mongolian words in order to be comprehensible. It was unavoidable that established terms should still carry their traditional historical and/or religious connotations (Holland and Quinn 1987; Wierbicka 1992). In this context pair words (*khorshoo üg*), which are very common in Mongolian, played a major role: two words carrying an analogous semantic potential are combined in lexical units, which could either provide an emphasis or evoke certain associations.[10] Pair words could, as they were very receptive for the adoption of new semantic fields, also carry traditional meanings with a potentially subversive content. The creation of the term for 'hygiene' is a prime example of conflicting semantics: on an abstract level, the combination *erüül akhui* (healthy existence) seemed to be closest to the intended meaning. But it lacked the aspect of cleanliness, which was actually the most important pragmatic aspect of the concept. In the end, the compound *ariun tsever* was established, which is a pair word combination of 'pure' and 'clean'.

Traditional Mongolian concepts of purity (*ariun*) did not, however, have much in common with the profane ideal of cleanliness inherent in modernist images of hygiene. Rather, the indigenous concept indicated a moral imperative with religious connotations. Depending on the context, the word *ariun* can either suggest 'holy' as, for example, *ariun oron*, 'holy land' (the related verb *ariutgakh* means 'to sanctify') or it can be an indirect indicator of admiration, as in the sense of 'holy duty' (*ariun üüreg*). It also carries, especially in combination with *setgel* (thought) or *sanaa* (intention, idea), the meaning of 'honesty' and 'purity of the soul' (*ariun setgel sanaa*). Traditional practices of purification were, therefore, entirely different from socialist understandings of cleanliness in the sense of hygiene. When recalling that time, an elderly shaman described the following:

[9] This normative concept of 'culture' is also found in many rural areas of the former USSR, especially those inhabited by nomads (Grant 1995: 80ff; Habeck 2005; Vitebsky 2005: 193).

[10] For insightful examples see Kapisovská (2002).

> First of all, it was a struggle against the old social order. Nothing should be preserved. [...] Shamanism was seen as a backward remnant of the past. [...] Nevertheless, much was done secretly. For example, people kept the practice of setting animals free (*seterlesen*).[11] This was done for purification (*ariutgakh, ariutgal*).[12]

Traditional practices of purification did not involve water, but fire. A shaman could, with the help of fire, purify from evil (*muu muukhaig ariutgakh*), and some of those practices were later adopted by Buddhist monks. After a burial, for example, every person involved (and their horses as well) had to pass between two fires in order to purify themselves. The fire in the stove is, according to shamanist notions, inhabited by the 'fire mother' (*galyn ekh*) which, after the Buddhist conversion, was sometimes also called the 'fire Buddha' (*galyn Burkhan*). The goddess symbolises the continuation of generations and was worshipped by daily sacrifices of butter. Correspondingly, the rural population of Mongolia was suspicious when iron stoves were introduced in the late 1950s. A former driver, who then worked for the state trade organisation and was in charge of distributing modern consumer goods, described it as follows:

> When the iron stoves first appeared in the fifties, people said, "now we have to lock our fire mother into an iron jail." But later most people did like it when they recognised how nice it was in the yurts without smoke. Moreover, it was much cleaner and lung diseases decreased.[13]

According to the anthropologist Khalzaagiin Bayarmaa, it was forbidden to throw waste into the fire, to turn knives towards it and, most importantly, to squirt water onto the fire. According to traditional notions water could even be a polluting element. For example, it is taboo to pour water into milk, because water is associated with the colour black, which represents the bad. By contrast, it is beneficial to pour milk into water, as the good, inherent in the colour white, symbolically triumphs when this is done. In Mongolian understanding milk has always been the epitome of purity, so a libation of milk is a common way to worship nature or to hold farewell ceremonies in order to let both environment and

[11] Releasing animals is a kind of sacrifice for local spirits (*lus savdag*).

[12] Interview with the Shaman D.B. from Khovd-Province (10th August 2005 in Ulaanbaatar).

[13] Interview with the former truck driver (13th August 2005 in Khovd).

thoughts become ‘pure as milk’ (*süü shig ariun*). The ablution with water promoted in the hygiene campaigns, therefore, provoked scepticism, as it was feared that virtue and happiness would be washed away (*buyan khishgee ugaakh*). (Bayarmaa 2003; see also Ar”yaasüren and Nyambuu 1992)

In contrast to ‘purity’, the word for ‘clean’ or ‘cleanliness’ (*tsever*) was used almost exclusively in secular contexts, implying ‘freedom from contamination’ (for example *tsever agaa*–clean air, *tsever alt*–pure gold) or ‘orderly’ (for example *tsever bichig* – orderly script). In a broader sense—and this is where the two components of the newly created pair word for ‘hygiene’ met—*tsever* can also stand for ‘honesty’ (*ünench shudraga*). This third connotation of the compound was, of course, regarded as a desirable attribute of the new (and hygienic) socialist human being. It was not by accident that the historian Tsenddoo characterised the targeted communist order as a ‘regime of hygiene’ (*ariun tseveriin deglem*) (Tsenddoo 2007: 73).

## Initiators and Activists of the Hygiene Regime

The introduction of hygiene concepts was initiated by travelling Mongolian elites at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their belief in progress was founded on ideas of modernism: the discontinuation of traditions and norms, the affirmation of change and the progressive reorganisation of the world by means of scientific knowledge. Such modernist ideas reached the MPR either directly from Europe or via the Soviet Union. Instrumental in disseminating modernist thinking in the region were intellectual Buriat-Mongolians. As their territory had been part of the Russian Empire since 1720 they had much closer contact with European influences than most inhabitants of the Mongolian heartland. Thus, not least because of their bilingualism, Buriats were predestined for the role of translators and mediators. Nevertheless, rather than acting as agents of Russian power, many became involved in the pan-Mongolian movement, pursuing their own, ethno-nationalistic agenda. At the beginning of the twentieth century their motivation was not inspired by a wish for closer connections with Russia, but by the prospect of founding an autonomous Mongolian nation state. Thus, Europe was a more appropriate model for the orientation of the Mongolian elite than their two mighty neighbours, Russia and China. After 1911,

once Outer Mongolia had declared its autonomy from China, there emerged the paradoxical situation that the promotion of identity claims seemed to depend upon foreign models of modernisation. (Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006: 34–38)

Much has been written about the official goals of Mongolian cultural campaigns, as well as about their diverse outcomes (Baldoo 1967; Davaasambuu 1975; Tserendorj 1976; Nyam-Osor 1981; Zhalan-Aazhav 1981; BNMAU-yn Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi 1981, 1986; Demberel, Chimedtseren and Urangoo 1991). However, very little has been said about what actually happened at the implementation stage. Publications on the cultural history of the MPR, and even contemporary periodicals, make no mention of the interactions and negotiations, let alone explicit conflicts.[14] Questions like the following remain unanswered: what measures were taken to implement official resolutions? Who was involved in translating political goals at the grassroots level on the steppes? How did people interact in specific situations? How were state representatives perceived? What was the campaigns' infrastructure? What elements of the campaigns were embraced and why? And, finally, how did all those gleaming kettles, crisp bed sheets, tooth brushes, radios, newspapers, clocks and bookshelves actually get out to the nomadic camps?

In order to explore these questions I conducted a total of 172 interviews with people from different provinces, ethnic groups (Khalkha, Kazakh, Ööld, Dörvöd, Zakhchin, Uriankhai, Myangad, Buriat, Dariganga) and professional backgrounds in 2005 and 2006. In addition to the interviews, I studied written materials and photographs in archives and libraries in Ulaanbaatar, the Western Mongolian Province Khovd and the Eastern Provinces Khentei, Dornogov' and Sükhbaatar. I looked at artefacts of cultural campaigns in yurts, apartments, museums, clubs, administrative buildings, and the Transmongolian Railway. During my fieldwork I used an ethnomethodological approach to capture the campaign language of the time, to learn about the categories used by the different actors and to investigate the campaigns as "situated practices". (Garfinkel 2002: 1) In the following, I will give a few

[14] The only exceptions are a few, recurrent anecdotes published in journals, like *Matar* or *Tonshuul*, which usually carried an educational message, leading me to the assumption that they did not so much relate something that really happened but rather functioned as case studies created for didactic purposes.

socio-linguistically oriented examples of campaign communication. (cf. Vacek and Oberfalzerova 2002) The material sheds light on recent Mongolian history by demonstrating how the campaigns were actually experienced at the grassroots level. It illustrates the conflicts that arose but also how some of these could be avoided and why the campaigns finally succeeded in changing attitudes and behaviour.

When interviewing witnesses of the campaign period, it became evident that although many elements of the campaigns had been adopted from Soviet models, the interaction among locals opened up a considerable potential for Mongolization. This did not only apply to the choice of didactic methods, such as traditional forms of oral literature, especially lecture poetry (*surgaal*), proverbs and songs, but also to the implementation strategies, which had to involve both 'sedentary' (*suurin*) and 'nomadic' (*nüüdliin* or *yavuulyn*) measures in order to reach the entire population. (Tserendorj 1976: 14) But how was the dual meaning of the socialist concept of 'culture' brought home to the people? In general, mobilisation was the key issue of the campaigns. In order to mobilise 'the people', state representatives, themselves, had to become mobile: when striving towards the implementation of socialist concepts of culture, they had to go to people's homes, the majority of which were hard-to-reach moving targets on the vast steppes. Policy implementers, therefore, gathered in hygiene control commissions (*ariun tseveriin shalgaltyn komiss*) and undertook periodic tours of inspection through the nomadic herders' camps (see Table 1).

| Institutions | Personnel |
|---|---|
| Hospital | • Doctor<br>• nurse |
| Administration | • head of province (*aimgiin darga*)<br>• head of district (*sumyn darga*) |
| Revolutionary People's Party | • head of party (province or district level, sometimes: capital) |
| Herder collective (*negdel*) | • head of collective (*negdliin darga*)<br>• head of brigade (*brigadyn darga*) |
| Veterinary station | • veterinarian and/or assistant<br>• "zoo-technician" |
| Educational institutions and workplaces | • school/kindergarten teacher<br>• head of production / department |
| Revolutionary Youth Organisation | • head of a cell<br>• agitator |
| Cultural Institutions | • leader of a club<br>• librarian<br>• cultural functionary |

Table 1: Institutions & Personnel in the Peripatetic Hygiene Control Commissions

The intervals of the visits varied, according to circumstances like distance to the pastoralists' camps, season, political pressure (namely forthcoming anniversaries), available personnel and perceived necessity. They took place at most once a week and at least two times a year: in spring, between the lambing season and the beginning of purchasing livestock products, and in autumn at the time of preparations for winter. One reason that the mobile hygiene control commissions turned out to be the most effective tool for implementing the socialist concept of culture within the private sphere was the concerted action of representatives of different institutions. Another important factor was undoubtedly the centralized organisation of Mongolia's society, which made it easier

to coordinate the different subsystems for concerted action. The social infrastructure, especially state institutions, played the main role. Beside hospitals and veterinary stations, everyone was affected either via the workplace (herder collective, enterprise, factory or office), educational institutions (kindergarten, school or university), or via cultural services (library, club, theatre or concert). While campaigns in the Soviet Union often competed with other forms of political activism (Bernstein 1967: 47; Clark 2000: 161), Mongolian efforts were efficiently combined. For example, the 1969–71 cultural campaign organised in preparation of the 50th anniversary of the revolution, proclaimed the 'cultured family' (*soyolch ail,* sometimes also called *soyolch suur'*) as its motto. Families could earn this title plus a red pennant by scoring eighteen points for being in possession of items such as a washstand, tooth brushes, towels, a radio, a home library and newspaper subscriptions. Organized as a competition, this part of the campaign became very popular. Later on the title was not only awarded to families but also to individuals, such as the 'cultured pupil' (*soyolch suragch*) for good learners who were also extra-ordinary cleanly. Cultural campaigns in the MPR pursued several objectives and the two main sectors of social policy were linked in multiple ways: the health system became a pedagogical objective and the education system contained health features. In practice, this led to an interchange of the respective actors' perspectives, whether they were students acting as hygiene monitors in the classroom or nurses providing health education training as members of the peripatetic hygiene control commissions.

At the implementation stage everything depended on the cleverness of the respective individuals. In the end, success or failure of their approaches was recognised easily, and hence the implementers, who wanted people to act in a certain way, were seemingly under more pressure to produce results than their target groups. Rather than simply threatening and coercing people, they were forced to develop sophisticated persuasion tactics. My interview analysis led me to the conclusion that this mutual dependence was more of a permanent source for potential conflicts than the objectives of the cultural campaigns themselves. Even nomenklatura cadres, who had gained considerable power, found themselves subject to criticism. Here is an example from an interview with a former party leader who, as a young man, was notorious for being a hothead:

> I was born into a herder family (*malchin garaltai*) in Möst-Sum. After I finished the agriculture technical school in Khovd city, I went back to the countryside and was working as a zootechnician and veterinarian. From 1975–78 I held a leading position as a propagandist in the Revolutionary Youth League and then worked for two years as the leader of the agricultural department of our province. Then I was delegated to the party college of higher education in Ulaanbaatar. [...] My role during cultural campaigns, well, I was a leading party member then. The party was always most important; what we did was always right. I was also this type of person, a bad leader, too harsh (*dendüü shirüün khatuu*). That's why the people were afraid when I stayed in their yurts overnight. Fortunately, another party member took me aside and told me not to overact because people did not like such behaviour. Well, that made me think, and I finally came to my senses (*ukhaand orson*). Later on, I established good relationships with people, which was essential for a good cooperation.

This example underlines one crucial characteristic of the cultural campaigns: unlike propaganda, they could not be carried out simply by indoctrinating people. Instead, campaigns had to create convictions, which would then translate into behaviour and had to result in visible changes. While many party cadres continued to act enthusiastically and showed demonstrative optimism, their target group often did not share their visions of the future. Their attempts to change the social order thus lead them to a paradox. As M. Djilas has astutely pointed out: "[…] the communists differ from all others by their permanent endeavours to produce voluntary achievements." (Djilas 1958: 146) This statement applies to cultural campaigns in particular.

Nevertheless, in retrospect, the vast majority of my interviewees evaluated the outcomes of cultural campaigns as positive, albeit not without ambivalence. Most people considered them as 'very much needed' (*mash kheregtei*) and rather criticised certain of their methods as 'very hard' (*ikh khatuu*) or 'exhausting' (*yadargaatai*). Compared to the "campaign mentality" (Clark 2000: 92) dominant during the post-revolutionary period, those in charge seemed to have abstained from an excessively abrasive attitude as a result of mutual learning. The historian J. Boldbaatar has summarised it as follows:

> Although the cultural campaigns often suffered from the domination of state institutions and there were deviations and overreaction, the whole society became literate and considerable steps were taken in

> order to ‘pervade the living with culture’ (*akhuid soyol nevtrüülekh*) (Boldbaatar 2003: 147).

One reason that the campaign processes in the MPR progressed relatively smoothly, compared to the Soviet Union, was the fact that implementers almost everywhere were locals. This was usually not the case in the USSR, where outsiders were preferred for leading roles, most of them being city cadres who “tended to become bureaucrats” (Bernstein 1967: 10). According to Clark, those campaigners had “an attitude of ‘us against them’” (Clark 2000: 169). In Mongolia, as this interview extract shows, most experts and cadres were rooted in the local rural community. During the campaign, these people had to balance different roles or to act as what Vickers calls a “complex agent”:

> This is not a unified or unitary body, but a discursively constituted set of overlapping entities with common relationships that are constantly changing. Thus within a complex agent one can find opposing tendencies and differences in kind. (Vickers 2004: 37)

When analysing complex agency, another factor should not be underestimated: virtually all levels of the society were affected, and hence each and every person was involved in the campaigns in one way or another. Many actors had to balance conflicting roles, as they were both implementers and members of the target group. Throughout the process they were expected to implement state policy directions, yet at the same time they had to be mindful of their kinship ties and, more generally, their reputations. The representatives of different state institutions all had their own agendas within the hygiene control commissions. Like a kaleidoscope, this yielded a variety of interactions between state representatives and herder families. In retrospect, this mobile component of the campaigns turned out to be the most effective tool for implementing the socialist concept of culture within the private sphere.

## Uninvited Guests: Peripatetic Hygiene Commissions on the Mongolian Steppe

When the hygiene control commissions entered a nomadic camp for their regular visits, each side knew what the other would expect. These mutual expectations resulted in predictable behaviour and

followed what I call 'hygiene control scripts'. The scripted situation is evident even in the campaign language, as when my interviewees mentioned "*ariun tseveriin üzleg*", which literally means 'hygiene reviewing' from the implementer's perspective, or "*soyoljiltyn beltgel*", which means 'civilisational preparation' representing the families' view. Both sides were aware that they were part of a performance, which was, of course, far removed from everyday events and could better be described as a celebration of socialist simulation techniques. It was not, therefore, perceived to be a *faux pas*, when, as happened many times, members of the commission stepped out of the car to be greeted by the children of the camp shouting: "Hallo! How are you? Please, come quickly to us, our mother has just cleaned everything!"

Every household owned a 'hygiene booklet' (*ariun tseveriin devter*), which was a controlling tool for commission members, who inspected the entire interior of the yurt for cleanliness, as well as taking an inventory of hygiene items. Two areas were of particular interest: on the eastern (the women's) side of the yurt, kitchen equipment, including foodstuffs was closely examined. While the western (the men's) side was traditionally used for storing ordinary saddles, bridles and the receptacle for fermented mare's milk, it was now additionally furnished with a socialist innovation: the so-called hygiene corner (*ariun tseveriin bulan*). This usually consisted of a washstand (*ugaaguur*), framed by hygiene articles, which were preferably kept in separate holders. During their visits, members of the hygiene commission asked repeatedly how often people washed the covers of their pastry boards or used the public bathhouse and so on. They also inspected the two medicine chests, for humans and livestock, and the herders' working equipment. The hygiene booklets contained clearly-specified requirements and, if they deemed it necessary, the commission members gave assignments to be completed by their next inspection.

Almost all of my interviewees listed items that they did not have in their households prior to the hygiene campaigns and their frequent references to the 'primitive' (*büdüüleg*) state of things in the past. This made me wonder how modern consumer goods actually made their way out the nomadic camps. Those articles had to be produced or imported, and it was a long time before available supplies met the requirements of the hygiene control brigades. The contrast between high expectations and the omnipresent scarcity of consumer goods—

in the interviews often referred to as ‘cultured products’ (*soyoltoi baraa*) or even ‘items you have to queue for’ (*oochirtoi baraa*)—was a constant challenge, not only for the herders, but also for the members of the control commissions. The situation gradually improved after the MPR joined the CMEA. From the mid-1970’s onwards, Mongolians came to know their socialist brother countries in Europe not only through the media, but also through soaps and washing powder imported from Bulgaria or East Germany. Establishing an infrastructure that would permanently supply the nomads with available consumer goods then seems to have become an easier task. A ‘trading agent’ (*aagnt*) was responsible for providing each camp with hygiene items according to the number of family members. There were two types: either a member of the herder collective, who set up a kind of shop in a yurt, or a professional trader, who regularly visited the seasonal camps by horse, camel or car. Both were referred to a ‘mobile shop’ (*nüüdliin delgüür*). As former agents told me, they intimidated people into buying allocated objects, even if they were not eager to do so, and they also retained goods for those who could not afford them at a certain time.

The different elements of the campaigns were increasingly carried out by professionals. From the President for Hygiene Control in the Ministry of Health (*ariun tseveriin khyanaltyn yerönkhiilögch*) to the Hygiene Monitors in every institution (*ariun tseveriin darga*), the campaigns were professionalized at every level. Additionally, the Council of Ministers issued a decree in 1965 that special classes should be set up in order to train cadres for culture and enlightenment work (*soyol gegeerliin ajiltan*). A year later, the title Cultural Functionary of Outstanding Merit (*soyolyn gav’yat zütgelten*) was established for those who had been active and successful in cultural work for many years, especially in clubs, houses of culture, so-called Red Yurts, libraries and museums. (Amarkhüü 1968: 32, 91) One reason for the ultimate success of the campaigns was the concerted action of representatives of different institutions, who combined not only their respective tasks but also made simultaneous attempts to agitate, implement, control and, at the same time, monitor and evaluate ongoing processes. Lessons learned in the process translated into continuous adaptations and, with each resumption, campaigns were organised in an increasingly sophisticated manner. The system of breaking down the campaigns’

overall objectives into easily comprehensible goals, such as the requirements written in the hygiene booklets, served to make the results measurable, in conjunction with the ramified award system. Above all, they were reportable and statistical data was collected about the state of education and hygiene. These materials were poured into the nationwide data collection for the 'socialist competition' (*sotsialist uraldaan*) between the different provinces. Statistics became an important reference point when discussing delaying factors regarding the voyage into the bright future. They were also increasingly used as an argument for mobilising people. Members of the travelling hygiene control commissions used them to try to motivate people not to get behind on the imaginary voyage towards communism: they accused all who did not jump onto the moving train of socialism of being awkward brake blocks, who had not yet freed themselves from the primitive heritage of feudalism and hindered all the others in moving on. In the light of those constructed references to 'backwardness', even not possessing a towel or a toothbrush could easily become a political issue.

Different actors each told me about the pressures they felt while trying to implement their respective agendas and to make herders change their behaviour. For example, the time frame for a campaign was usually set in accordance with socialist anniversaries. In preparation for those occasions, every institution and administration was required to prepare reports. Of special interest were figures such as the number of illiterates and the outcomes of the 'socialist competition' (*sotsialist uraldaan*). According to Shagdarsüren (1976), everyone was involved in this competition through his or her workplace from the 1960s onwards. In order to obtain the title of 'brigade [fighting] for socialist labour' (*sotsialist khödölmöriin tölöö brigad*) the collective had to meet not only work standards but also hygiene requirements. Those awarded the title 'hero of labour' (*khödölmöriin baatar*) became famous throughout the country, gained considerable social prestige and are still revered to this day. In my interviews people frequently referred to someone as a 'hero of labour', and even historiographic chronologies published after 1990 mention these heroes, who were awarded their titles around the time of anniversaries, such as the milker Avirmed in 1959 or the goat breeder Jamts in 1971 (Demberel et al. 1991; Buyandelger 2002: 125ff). However, after such stressful events the actors usually relaxed. Dorzhsuren (1981: 108) described it as follows:

> Every anniversary can be compared to a mountain peak. When Mongolians have climbed a hill, they get off their horse, check the saddle and let the horse recover its breath.

When visiting nomadic camps, hygiene commission members created a climate of priority by threatening those who did not fulfil the requirements with the phrase: “We will take measures!” (*Arga khemjee avna!*). This suggested something cruel, but in the case of hygiene campaigns ‘measures’ usually meant public shaming. There were various means for doing so, such as putting a dirty towel with the name of the owner up on a blackboard and exposing it to the public eye. But the most common method was affixing symbols, either on the information boards of collectives or at the yurts of herders. The cleanest households received a red flag or a red star; lower-ranking symbols included, in decreasing order of approbation, aeroplanes, cars, ox-carts, woodpeckers, whips, black bells, hedgehogs, frogs and, finally, pigs. Those who got a pig were given assignments they had to carry out within a week, otherwise the pig would not be removed.

Interestingly, these symbols were never mentioned in official texts and appeared to vary between different institutions. These measures were designed to intimidate people into taking action. On the other hand, members of the hygiene commissions were very cautious about distributing pigs, because this would have suggested that they themselves had not been working effectively to convince the target group to change its behaviour. They found themselves in the role of what my interviewees called ‘small leaders’ (*jijig darga nar*). A former teacher described the pressure within the power hierarchy by pointing out: “The big bosses threatened the small ones” (*Tom ni jijig dargyg ailgasan*). These people, who were acting at the grassroots level of campaign implementation, had to assume responsibility for creating visible results. In particular, the representatives of herder collectives were closely related to their target groups and permanently acted as mediators.

## Inner Emigration, Mimicry and Making Fun of Campaigns: Common Reactions

When I asked my interviewees about how the hygiene controls were received, some people told me that the target group just sat and

waited silently (*dugai suusan*). Aware of the peripatetic nature of its power, they just looked forward to seeing the backs of the commission and being able to go on with their lives. This form of temporary inner emigration was very common. However, this passiveness was also the reaction most dreaded by the implementers: people who could not be mobilized to fulfil their assignments were a threat, as success was measured in terms of visible change. In many cases, however, people were not entirely passive, but simply refused to follow absurd demands, such as serving tea bowls on a tray.

Another reaction to campaign interventions could be called mimicry or display. Many interviewees told me entertaining stories about how people tried to give the impression of compliance, even though they were not convinced of the benefits of, for example, using bed sheets or toothbrushes. Before the hygiene inspectors came in, they took pristine sheets out of their dressers, which had never been used in order to keep them clean for the inspection (*üzlekhiin tul*). Overacting was the opposite reaction: some people prepared so meticulously for the inspections that even commission members felt obliged to stop theirn excessive cleaning. Several interviewees told me that some women cleaned the big cooking cauldron (*togoo*) again and again, even on the outside, and tried in vain to get rid of the soot. In another case a woman offered tea to the commission members and nervously cleaned the tea pots in front of them again using cloth and saliva.

Attempts were made to avoid the consequences of hygiene controls by escaping the situation altogether, a tactic mostly employed by children. One person told me:

> Our parents told us to clean the yurt on the day the hygiene commission was expected to arrive. While playing, we completely forgot to do so. When we realized that the commission was coming, we quickly locked the yurt, mounted on our horses and escaped to hide behind the nearest mountain.

In any case, preventing the commission from checking was much easier than bearing the burden of being awarded with a pig. Disputes were relatively rare, but using the arguments of the other side proved very effective. Elderly people, in particular, could often not be convinced to radically change their behaviour. Before the cultural campaigns they used to sleep under their *deels* (traditional clothing), instead of using blankets. One woman told me that when the commission tried to force her father to sleep under a blanket, he

replied that this would keep him from sleeping well and if he was tired the next day he would be unable to do good work for the socialist society. Was that what they really wanted?

Irony was a very common way of handling the situation. As part of the socialist competition it was common that every person had to write down obligations he or she promised to fulfil. This kind of externally-forced self-determination, as well as attempts to sovietise Mongolian culture, were widely resented and criticised. One person, working at the Chandman'-Sum-Center electricity station in Khovd province handed over a letter setting out his obligations concerning the socialist competition (*sotsialist uraldaany üüreg*) to his superior who, instead of reading it, put the paper in a drawer and completely forgot about it. Weeks later, a control commission came to monitor the progress of the socialist competition. They checked the obligation papers and were shocked to read what the person had written:

> I will change the diesel motor I work with
> Into a nuclear plant
> I will read all the books in the library
> In Russian as well as in Mongolian from beginning to end
> I will learn 3 to 5 Russian words by heart every day
> And gradually forget my mother tongue
> I will replace my Mongolian wife Dolgor
> With a Russian Nina.

As with other modernisation measures introduced during socialism, it was not so much the overall goals of the cultural campaigns that were criticised as two of their aspects: firstly, the tendency to deny the indigenous Mongolian culture, which was under-represented in official contexts, and secondly, the rituals and performances that created the appearance of compliance, while the relevant socialist features were still absent in reality.

The actors' perception of cultural campaigns was largely shaped by their professional identities, which determined their categories of mental images as well as their logics of interaction and is still the main reference point when looking back at this period. One reason why, despite all criticism, the effects of the cultural campaigns are widely regarded as positive is undoubtedly the retrospective perspective. Almost all of my interviewees pointed out how their standard of living had been improved by introducing household items and appliances such as iron stoves, white tarpaulins, and radios. Cultural events brought to the countryside by peripatetic

theatre and dance troups (*soyol urlagyn brigad*) as well as mobile cinemas and libraries created a feeling of social involvement among the nomads which has been painfully missed since 1990.

## EPILOGUE

While cultural institutions like theatres and cinemas disappeared after 1990, the system of awards has been reinvented: one interviewee, who had formerly worked as a driver in Khovd province, highlighted the fact that his household had last been awarded the title 'cultured family' in 2003. A Kazakh living in the city of Nalaikh explained that after the changes in 1990 they lacked the ability to acknowledge families who did more than the average for the cultural development of the community. To fill this vacuum, they decided to reestablish the honorary title 'outstanding family' (*tergüünii örkh*). While travelling with the Transmongolian Railway from Ulaanbaatar to Sainshand (East Gobi), I started leafing through the passenger guest book (*sanal khüseltiin devter*) of my wagon. The introductory part written by Mongolian Railway officials, used a neutral, service-oriented language, whereas the passengers' entries expressed a different spirit. To my astonishment, I found a precious assortment of socialist cultural rhetoric:

> [I] am having a very comfortable and nice journey from UB [Ulaanbataar] towards Sainshand. With kind regards and many thanks to your train collective (*khamt olon*), who provide a very cultured and cultivated (*soyoltoi bolovson*) service. (24th April 2005)
>
> Travelling from UB [Ulaanbataar] to Darkhan by Train Chief Enkhtuvshin's train No. 211, I would like to thank the wagon attendants for their sprightly and energetic (*khöngön shuurkhai*) service. I was pleased with how they were constantly cleaning everything (*togtmol tseverlegee khiij*) and providing us with hot coffee and tea. I express my greetings to your collective (*khamt olon*) for the upcoming 84th anniversary[15] and wish you great success for your future work (*ajil khödölmör*). (1st July 2005)

References to hygiene are ubiquitous: whenever passengers in the Mongolian Railway pick up their bed sheets, the attached

[15] Counted from 1921, the year of the People's Revolution.

instructions ask them to use all items in the ‘right [and] cultivated way’ (*zöv soyoltoi khereglene üü*).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to everyone who granted me an interview, who showed me artefacts and photographs or even performed campaign songs and poetry for me. Many thanks are due to my Mongolian friends, especially to L. Nyamsüren (Khovd) and D. Azzayaa (Ulaanbaatar), who helped me with some interview arrangements and gave very inspiring comments.

## REFERENCES

Amarkhüü, O. (ed.) 1968. *Ardyn bolovsrol, soyol urlag, shinjlekh ukhaany talaarkhi khuul’ togtoomjiig sistemchilsen emkhtgel. 1964–1967 on* [Compilation of Laws and Decrees Regarding Peoples’ Education, Culture, Art, and Science from 1964–1967]. Ulaanbaatar [publisher not noted].

Ar“yasüren, Ch. and Kh. Nyambuu 1992. *Mongol yos zanshliin ikh tailbar tol’.* [Large Dictionary of Mongolian Conventions and Customs.] Ulaanbaatar: ’Süülenkhüü’ khüükhdiin khevleliin gazar.

Baldoo, B. 1967. BNMAU-yn dakh’ soyolyn khuv’sgalyn zarim asuudal. [Regarding Selected Problems of the Cultural Revolution in the MPR.] *Erdem shinjilgeenii oguulluudiin emkhtgel.* 3. Ulaanbaatar: Namyn tüükhiin institut.

Bawden, C. R. 1968. *The Modern History of Mongolia*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Bayarmaa, K. 2003. *Mongol yos zanshil*. [Mongolian Conventions and Customs.] Ulaanbaatar: Admon.

Bernstein, T.P. 1967. Leadership and Mass Mobilisation in the Soviet and Chinese Collectivisation Campaigns of 1929–30 and 1955–56: A Comparison. *The China Quarterly*, 31: 1–47.

BNMAU-yn Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi (1981): BNMAU-yn soyolyn tüükh (1921–1940). Tergüün bot’. [The History of Culture of the MPR (1921–1940). Volume 1.] Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Khevleliin Gazar.

BNMAU-yn Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi 1986. BNMAU-yn soyolyn tüükh (1941–1960). Ded bot’. [The History of Culture of the MPR (1941–1960). Volume 2.] Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Khevleliin Gazar.

Boldbaatar, J. 2003. Mongolyn zaluuchuudyn khodolgoonii tüükhiin asuudald. [On Problems of the History of the Mongolian Youth Movement.] In *Tüükh. Erdem shinjilgeenii bichig—tuukh II—No. 211 (20).* Ulaanbaatar: Mongol Ulsyn Ikh Surguul’, niigmiin shinjlekh ukhaany surguul’: 139–54.

Bulag, U. 1998. *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Buyandelger, R. 2002. *Nalaikhyn tüükhen temdeglel*. [Notes on the History of Nalaikh]. Ulaanbaatar. [Publisher not noted].

Clark, C.E. 2000. *Uprooting Otherness. The Literacy Campaign in NEP-Era Russia.* Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, London: Associated University Press.

Dashjamts, D. 1974. Marksizm-Leninizm Mongold delgeren kheregdsen ni (1917–1940 on). Ulaanbaatar. [Publisher not noted].

Dashrentsen, G. 2005. Tsedenbalyn soyolyn dovtolgoon, Elbegdorjiin kompyuteriin dovtolgoon. [Tsedenbal's Cultural Campaigns, Elbegdorj's Computer Campaigns.] *Ödriin Sonin*, 07.07.2005: 3.

Davaasambuu, P. 1975. *BNMAU-yn soyol gegeerliin ajlyn tüükhen toim*. [Historical Overview on Enlightenment Work in the MPR.] Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Khevleliin Gazar.

Demberel, S., E. Chimedtseren and J. Urangoo 1991. BNMAU-yn tüükhiin zarim ner tom"yoo, on tsagiin tailbar tol'. [Explanatory Dictionary of Selected Historical Terms in the MPR.] Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Khevleliin Gazar.

Djilas, M. 1958. *Die neue Klasse. Eine Analyse des kommunistischen Systems*. München: Kindler. [Title of the Original Serbian Manuscript: Nova Klasa. Kritika savremenog komunizma].

Dorzhsuren, Y. 1981. The Flowering of Art and Culture. In *The 60th Anniversary of People's Mongolia.* Novosti Press Agency Publishing House and Unen Editorial Board: 108–22.

Enkhbaatar L. and N. Dondog 2003. *Belgiin zamyn khaldvart övchintei temtsen turshlaga.* [Experiences in Combating Venereal Diseases]. Nyu Maind: Khevleliin Gazar.

Garfinkel, H. 2002 [1976]. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Grant, B. 1995. *In the Soviet House of Culture. A Century of Perestroikas.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Habeck, J.O. 2005. Cultured Places in an Uncultured Landscape: Notions of Culture in Novosibirsk. *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Report 2004–2005.* Halle/Saale: 263–64.

Harke, H. and M. Dischereit 1976. *Geographische Aspekte der sozialistischen ökonomischen Integration.* [Geographical Aspects of Socialist Economic Integration.] Gotha/Leipzig: VEB Hermann Haack, Geographisch-Kartographische Anstalt.

Holland, D. and N. Quinn 1987. *Cultural Models in Language and Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Humphrey, C. and D. Sneath 1999. *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment of Inner Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Khurana, T. and S. Diekmann 2007. Latenz. Eine Einleitung. *In* S. Diekmann and T. Khurana (eds), *Latenz.* Berlin: Kadmos.

Kapisovská, V. 2002. Preliminary Study of Loanwords in Modern Mongolian: Communicative Approach to Lexical Integration. *In* J. Vacek and A. Oberfalzerová (eds), *Mongolica Pragensia '02. Ethnolinguistics and Sociolinguistics in Synchrony and Diachrony.* Prag: Charles University.

Lkhagvasüren, I. 2003. *XX zuuny Mongolchuud.* [Mongolians of the 20th Century.] Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

Marx, K. and F. Engels 1947. *Evkhamt Namyn Tunkhag* [Manifesto of the Communist Party], Ulaanbaatar.

Nyam-Osor, D. 1981. Health Protection for the People. In *The 60th Anniversary of People's Mongolia.* Novosti Press Agency Publishing House and Unen Editorial Board: 96–98.

Sanzhasuren, R. 1981. The Torch of Knowledge. In *The 60th Anniversary of People's Mongolia.* Ulaanbaatar: Ünen Editorial Board & Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House: 89–91.

Shagdarsüren, L. 1976. *BNMAU-yn yerönkhii bolovsrolyn khödölmör politekhnik surguuliin üüsel, khögjilt.* [Origin and Development of General Polytechnic Schools in the MPR]. Ulaanbaatar: Ardyn bolovsrolyn yaamny khevlel.

Shirendyb, B. 1981. A historic Choice. In *The 60th Anniversary of People's Mongolia* Ulaanbaatar: Ünen Editorial Board & Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House: 19–25.

*Soyol-un Dobtulγ-a (1931).* Duγar 8–9 [*Cultural Campaign* (1931). Number 8–9]. Ulaγanbaγatur. [newspaper in classical Mongolian script].

Sneath, D. 2003. Lost in the Post: Technologies of Imagination, and the Soviet Legacy in Post Socialist Mongolia. *Inner Asia*, 5: 39–52.

Steiner-Khamsi, G. and I. Stolpe 2006. *Educational Import. Local Encounters with Global Forces in Mongolia*. New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stolpe, I. 2005. "Bolovsrol", "Surgan khümüüjil" zereg ügsiin mongol ukhagdakhuun. [Educational Terminology and Metaphors in Mongolian Language and Culture]. In *Zaluu mongolch erdemtdiin zuny surguuli: olon ulsyn erdem shinjilgeenii khural.* Ulaanbaatar: Mongol Sudlalyn Ündesnii Kholboo: 11–14.

Tsenddoo, B. 2005. Soyoloor dovtlokh. [Struggling for Culture.] *Ödriin Sonin* 294 (2115), 12: 13.

—— 2007 *Soyolyn dovtolgoo: ankhny khet gürnees süüliin nüüdelchin* [Cultural Campaigns: From First Imperium to Last Nomad]. Ulaanbaatar: Nepko.

Tserendorj, G. 1976. *BNMAU-d bichig üseg ül medekh yavdlyg arilgasan ni.* [Erasing Illiteracy in the MPR.] Ulaanbaatar: Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademiin khevlel.

Vacek, J. and A. Oberfalzerova 2002. Ethnolinguistics and Sociolinguistics in Synchrony and Diachrony. *Mongolica Pragensia '02.* Prague: Charles University, Institute of Indian and East Asian Studies.

Vickers, A. 2004. 'Malay Identity': Modernity, Invented Tradition and Forms of Knowledge. *In* T.P. Barnard (ed.) *Contesting Malayness. Malay Identity Across Boundaries.* Singapore: Singapore University Press: 25–55.

Vitebsky, P. 2005. *Reindeer People. Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia.* London, New York, Toronto, Sydney: Harper Perennial.

Wierzbicka, A. 1992. *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zhalan-Aazhav, S. 1981. The Revolutionary Vanguard of the Mongolian People. In *The 60th Anniversary of People's Mongolia.* Ulaanbaaatar, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House and Unen Editorial Board: 13–19.

# COMPETING FACTIONS AND ELITE POWER: POLITICAL CONFLICT IN INNER MONGOLIA

DAVID SNEATH

## INTRODUCTION

Inner Mongolia has been represented as the site of ancient ethnic conflict between Mongols and Chinese. The New York based Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Centre, for example, refers to the region as 'Southern Mongolia' since it considers Inner Mongolia to be an integral part of the Mongolian nation. It views the Han Chinese presence as a military occupation, and describes the last sixty years as "the darkest era ever in Mongolian history."[1] Another US-based activist group, the Inner Mongolian Peoples Party, describes Chinese state action in Inner Mongolia as "the policy and practice of genocide", writing:

> Since the late 1940s, Inner Mongolia fell under Chinese communist rule backed by the People's Liberation Army ... The Chinese government have moved in millions of Chinese to colonize Inner Mongolia and crushed ruthlessly any expressions of dissent among the Mongols. This brutal Chinese colonization of the Inner Mongols culminated in the death of fifty thousand Mongols and the imprisonment of six to seven hundred thousand more during the Cultural Revolution.[2]

There is no doubt as to the enormous scale of human suffering caused by the Cultural Revolution and associated period of Revolutionary Committee rule (1965–72). In 1979 the Inner Mongolia Communist Party Committee itself estimated that a campaign against suspected Mongolian separatists waged during this

---

[1] Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center's Statement at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) 6th Session, May 21st 2007, New York, [http://www.smhric.org/Latest_B.htm].

[2] The Declaration of Inner Mongolian People's Party (23rd March 1997, New Jersey) [http://members.aol.com/imppsite/dcl.htm].

time killed over 16,000 people, crippled nearly 90,000 and effected over a million people in one way or another. Other estimates of casualties are higher, and begin to approach the figures given by the activist groups (Woody 1993: 30–31; Atwood 2004: 250; Sneath 2000: 115).

But there are other narratives of conflict, alongside those of Han-Mongol enmity. Within the region itself a common theme is the deep disunity of the Mongolians of the region—in particular the bitter rivalry between East (*jegün*) and West (*baragun*) Mongols. At first glance this might seem to fit a familiar narrative of colonial expansion—the political divisions of the region reflect the historical process of a colonising power encroaching upon the territories of indigenous nomads who are themselves plagued with a deep tribalism.

A more careful examination of the history of conflict in Inner Mongolia shows, however, that it cannot be explained simply in terms of ethnic or tribal tensions. Rather, patterns of conflict reflect the struggle for power between factions of the ruling elite—both Han and Mongol.

## INNER MONGOLIA AS A ZONE OF ENCOUNTER

Inner Mongolia has long been seen as the encounter zone in which 'nomadic' Mongolian and agricultural Chinese cultures meet. The region of the Great Wall has been thought of as the northern frontier of Chinese political influence since the Han state faced its great steppe rival, the Xiongnu empire, in the third century BCE. A common view of this history casts the Chinese and steppe peoples as fundamentally distinct, natural rivals.[3] The Great Wall of China has tended to be seen as a product of an ancient ethnic division between the Han and their enemies; the archetypal Chinese defensive line against the alien and predatory nomads of the wild steppes. But as

[3] Thomas Barfield (1989) for example, treats the political division between China and the steppes as a sort of natural state. He describes the history of the region as a 'political ecology' in which cycles of growth and crisis are analogous to a forest ecosystem subject to periodic forest fires. So he argues that:

> … The bipolar world of a unified China and a unified steppe which split the frontier between them was a stable climax state. No alternative political structure could emerge while they existed. (Barfield 1989: 10)

Lattimore noted (1962: 240), the Great Wall was as much a device for keeping Chinese in, as for keeping barbarians out. It had more to do with controlling the subjects of the Chinese emperors than with military defence *per se* (1962: 441). This can be seen more clearly in the case of the division of Manchuria.

The Great Wall did not run across Manchuria; instead the boundary of Chinese settlement was marked by the famous Willow Palisades. These were lines of willow trees, protected by a deep ditch and broken at intervals by garrisoned checkpoints. They ran for hundreds of miles across the landscape, separating the agricultural Chinese from the largely pastoral peoples to the north. (Lee 1970) At first glance they might appear to be another huge defensive screen against barbarian invasion. But, in fact, the Willow Palisades were constructed not by fearful Chinese, but by Manchurian emperors themselves—rulers whose power base spanned the lands on both sides of this boundary. The first line was planted in the last years of the reign of the Manchu Shun-Chih Emperor (1644–61) and new lines were added in the reign of the Kangxi Emperor. They marked the internal boundaries of Chinese settlement within the Manchurian state itself, a continuation of an ancient policy dating from the Kitan empire (Liao dynasty) of the tenth century, by which rulers maintained separate administrations for their Chinese and northern/steppe subjects.

The region where the steppe met the agricultural lands of China may appear marginal and remote, but throughout its history this ‘frontier’ has been a source of military and political power. Aristocracies from this semi-pastoral zone have founded most of the dynasties that ruled northern China (the Northern Wei, Liao, Xia, Jin, Yuan and Qing, for example) and the most common pattern was not ethnically distinct Chinese and steppe polities, but states that ruled both. As Di Cosmo (2002) notes, historically we do not find sharp divisions between sedentary Chinese and the ‘nomads’. He writes:

> Even though the core of the state may have been monopolized by the nomadic aristocracy … nomadic and non-nomadic traditions tended to merge and form original socio-political architectures. (Di Cosmo 2002: 170)

Inner Mongolia was itself the product of another act of administrative division by the Manchu Qing dynasty. The Qing began to expand from their Manchurian base in the seventeenth century, extending their control to all the lands ruled by Mongolian

nobles, the last of whom swore fealty to the Manchu emperor in 1691. Administratively they divided Mongolia into two parts: Inner Mongolia was the term given to regions close enough to the seat of government to be governed directly by the *Li-fan-yuan*, the Court of Dependencies in Beijing, whilst the more distant Outer Mongolia was ruled indirectly, via the military governors of Urga, Uliasutai and Khobdo (Khovd). In the early twentieth century, as the Qing weakened, independence movements of various sorts began to emerge among the elites of both parts of Mongolia. When the Qing finally collapsed in 1911–12, Outer Mongolia declared its independence, under the head of the Buddhist establishment, and eventually became a Soviet satellite state—the Mongolian People's Republic. Inner Mongolia, however, remained entangled in the political turmoil of China.

## ARISTOCRATIC AND ETHNO-NATIONAL DISCOURSES OF MONGOL IDENTITY

Under the Qing the Mongolian aristocracy, the descendants of Chinggis Khan's lineage who held the title *taiji*, had enjoyed high status, particularly in the area of military appointments. Mongolia was divided into about a hundred petty principalities termed *khoshuu*—conventionally translated as 'banner' in English,[4] each governed by a *taiji* who held the title of *jasag*, meaning 'ruler'. The Inner Mongolian nobility were early converts to the Qing cause and had intermarried with the Manchu aristocracy since the earliest days of the dynasty. In this sense the Qing was something of a Manchu-Mongol enterprise and both elites regarded the Chinese as subjects of a dynastic realm within which they occupied senior positions. In this era it is difficult to identify a clear sense of Mongol ethnic identity that is distinct from the tracing of noble or elite ancestry.

Mongol commoners did not share common descent with the nobility, nor could they do so even in theory, since descent from

[4] The word *khoshuu* actually means 'snout' or 'wedge' and seems to be derived from the term of a military unit, since all such civil administrative units were simultaneously units for military muster. The equivalent Manchu term was, however, translated as 'banner.' At the end of the seventeenth century there were forty-nine *khoshuu* in Inner Mongolia and thirty-four in Outer Mongolia, but in the latter case the number increased to eighty-six by 1759 as a result of administrative reforms.

royal ancestors was the basis of exclusive aristocratic status. When, in a later era, Mongolian nationalists cast back through historical records for records of a common ethnic origin for all Mongols, all they could find were accounts of ruling lineages. The word *ündüsü* (root) that was used to generate the term for 'nationality' (*ündüsüten*) was originally a term indicating noble lineage. The 'lineage of the Mongols', then, really only meant the aristocracy.[5] As Atwood (2004: 507) puts it "[Chinggis Khan's] descendants, the *Taiji* class, were the only full members of the Mongolian community."

In the twentieth century this aristocratic political discourse was transformed by new ideologies, however.[6] Mongolian independence movements began to construct a new discourse of popular nationalism in which the shared descent of the Chinggisid lineage was used as the template for the concept of the Mongolian nationality. As Gellner (1983: 57) notes "Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society …", and in this case high culture included the tracing of Chinggisid descent.[7] As Munkh-Erdene notes:

> The terms and concepts of the Chinggisid lineage had became the lexical and conceptual underlying model and archetype of the Mongolian nationality lexicon … The Mongol nobility presented at

---

[5] In 1912, for example, the ruling princes of the Inner Mongolian administrative region of Ulanchab wrote a letter protesting at the new Chinese Republic's plan to incorporate Mongolian regions into China. They wrote:

> If (we Mongols) become the citizens [*irgen*] of the Chinese Republic [*zhong hua irgen ulus*], and the five races [*töröl*] unite and Mongol can no longer be our distinct name, then the bone-lineage/nationality [*yasu ündüsü*] of the Mongols [*Monggol khümün-ü*], born from Heaven in ancient times, will probably be obliterated … (Munkh-Erdene 2006: 85–86)

Descent from Heaven is a distinctive mark of rulership, not available to commoners. Thus the 'lineage of the Mongols, born from Heaven' indicates noble line, not mass ethnicity.

[6] One of the principle architects of the Mongolian nationalist lexicon was Tsyben Zhamtsarano, a Buryat nationalist and ethnographer trained in St. Petersburg University, who became a powerful influence on the Soviet-backed Mongolian People's Republic after it was established. Zhamtsarano translated European notions of nationhood into a Mongolian context. He identified the different Mongol polities as 'tribes', that is as *Mongolskie plemena* in Russian.

[7] The Chinggisid aristocracy, the Borjigid, traced descent from one of Chinggis Khan's ancestors, Bodonchar.

> least a putative descent community that came down from time immemorial, a primordial community. (2006: 91)

Kinship, then, was extended downwards to embrace the commoners, and in the new discourse the subjects of the lordly Mongolian lineages became, themselves, members of a political category conceived of as a sort of lineage-nationality—not so much a new imagined community, since the aristocratic notion of the Mongol polity already existed, but a political community imagined in a new way as a body with shared kin origins.

## THE CONFLICT FOR LAND

In the 1930s Owen Lattimore wrote:

> Throughout Inner Mongolia, the Chinese were encroaching and the Mongols being wiped out. The princes were supported by the Chinese authorities ... in the domains that were left to them; but at the same time they were forced to yield fresh grants of land to the Chinese every year. (1934: 27)

But rather than an ethnic struggle for survival, this process was more clearly a conflict over land: between the rival political economies of the princely estates of the Mongol nobility, on the one hand, and the smallholder agricultural settlement of the Chinese landowners, on the other. The process by which pastoral Mongols were displaced by agricultural Chinese was accelerating in Lattimore's time, but it was well underway in the late Qing period.[8]

Since the nineteenth century, Inner Mongolian nobles had found it profitable to lease or sell lands to Chinese agriculturalists, and this led to a creeping process by which Mongol pastoralists were dis-

[8] In the early period of Qing rule, the Manchu had installed agricultural colonies at various points in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia bordering Manchuria, and official granaries were maintained with specified reserves of grain for each administrative unit. This system was expanded in areas such as Jirem in the South East of Inner Mongolia, where the Mongolian inhabitants, particularly the elite, became accustomed to the continuous flow of wealth supplied by the Chinese agriculturalists working on their lands. The spreading agricultural areas broke up the remaining pastoral lands and reduced or eliminated pastoral mobility, so that the Mongolians themselves turned to agriculture. It became increasingly profitable and common for the ruling noble of the banner to sell or mortgage prime land to agriculturalists for profit.

placed by Han farmers. This continued despite the constant disapproval of the Qing state. The Manchu court valued the mobile pastoral nature of Mongolian banners, particularly for their ability to provide a mounted soldiery. The Manchu attempted to institute regular surveys of settlement and repeatedly forbade any further transfer of land to agriculture. But although the Mongol nobles were forbidden to allot land for cultivation without approval of Qing authorities, and were even instructed to expel Chinese settlers when the terms of their mortgages expired, this only succeeded in slowing, rather than halting, the process. The result was an increasing impoverishment of the poorer pastoralists, who were faced with shrinking pasture land. But this was not a simple case of ethnic conflict over land; it was principally the Mongol nobles who turned their commoners' grazing lands over to Chinese settlers, at least at first.

Popular Mongolian resistance to this process often took the form of largely hopeless armed revolt. In the second half of the nineteenth century a series of uprisings erupted in the regions subject to land appropriation. Of the various reasons for these clashes, Heissig (1972: 77) highlights the sale of Mongolian land to Chinese landlords. Some of these revolts were led by local nobles, but many were led by commoners against their Mongol princes. In the Töküm insurrection of 1899–1901, which was led by two commoners, the rebels defeated the forces mobilised by the ruling nobles of several banners, for example, and were only finally eliminated when local rulers enlisted the help of Russian troops with heavy artillery (Heissig 1972: 79–88).

Lattimore argues that the loss of land was the prime cause of the numerous Mongol rebellions from 1891 to 1930.[9]

> Some of these rebellions were declared, by their leaders, to aim at local autonomy, or the restoration of the Manchu Empire, or the unification of Inner and Outer Mongolia; but every one of them was made inevitable by the increasing pressure of Chinese colonization. (1934: 114)

It was as part of this tradition of armed resistance to land appro-

[9] There was a series of rebellions in the Barga region (now Hulun Buir), for example, aimed at autonomy from Chinese administration and colonisation, or union with independent Outer Mongolia. The later of these were in 1917 and 1928, and were semi-successful in that they won some concessions from the Chinese administration.

priation that the struggle for an independent Outer Mongolia was waged, indeed many of its leaders were from Inner Mongolia and had first led revolts there. It was the failure of the existing social order to resist Chinese appropriation of territory that provided the impetus for the Mongolian revolutionary movement.

As Lattimore pointed out, the emerging political leadership came to recognise:

> the futility of mere resistance as a method of preserving the integrity of Mongol territory and the Mongol people. What 'revolution' really means among the Mongols is open-eyed admission of the fact that independence cannot be maintained without the creation of social forms adequate to the life of a modern nation in the modern world. (1934: 126)

In China the mode of political imagination that motivated the state had a direct impact on the place of Mongols and their territory. In the Qing period Mongols had occupied a relatively privileged place in the social order. This changed dramatically in 1912, with the collapse of the Qing and the emergence of Republican China, with its explicit Han Chinese nationalism. In theory five 'peoples' were represented as participating in the formation of the Republic—the Han, Manchu, Mongols, Tibetans and Moslems. This was symbolised by a five-coloured flag, and can be seen as a political device to forestall the sort of separatist movements that emerged in Outer Mongolia. In reality, the Republican government favoured the interests of the Han Chinese, and pressure on Mongolian territory increased rapidly. Yuan Shikai divided Inner Mongolia into three military regions under Chinese governors. In 1914–15 officials in charge of colonisation began to develop legislative measures which transferred the rights to Mongolian land from the banner and its ruling *jasag* to the Chinese state. In the fragmented warlord era of 1917–27 Han officials continued to push ahead with the lucrative transfer of land for Chinese agriculture. One reason for the promotion of mass Han settlement appears to have been an aim to 'secure the frontier' on the part of the warlord and later nationalist governments (Chang et al. 1930: 70). Outer Mongolia had successfully broken away and Han settlers seemed the best guarantee of preventing further secession.

The Mongolian aristocratic and ecclesiastical elites had both benefited from Chinese colonialisation, but they recognised that ultimately they were being undermined by the steady flow of Chinese settlers. One peaceful form that resistance took was,

paradoxically enough, to accelerate the settlement of hitherto public grazing land by Mongols. The elite hoped that by bringing the land under cultivation and occupying it with Mongols the advance of Chinese settlement could be checked. In other regions the situation led to further armed revolts—such as the *duguilang* movements of Ordos (Atwood 2002). Mongols in some regions were disarmed, and bandits flourished alongside the troops of warlords and local mercenaries.

The situation created land-booms in Inner Mongolia in 1916–19 and 1926–28. Famine and civil war in China had led to huge numbers of Han Chinese prepared to farm Mongolian land and pay high rents and mortgages to do so. This may have impoverished Mongol pastoralists, who found their grazing lands shrinking, but it created large fortunes for Chinese officials and land speculators. This was a process that was as much political as economic or ethnic. The banners were small political-economic units of their own, ruled by a Mongol noble, and containing wide tracts of grazing land which the noble's subjects used for mobile pastoralism, raising their lord's livestock alongside their own herds. The Qing had sought to protect the banner units because one important product of these systems was the skilled horsemen they valued for the military. In this political economy land formed part of a wider system of potentially large-scale pastoral movement; it was not generally subject to long-term private possession. The land played a very different role in the political economy of Chinese agriculture, however. It became a saleable and rent-generating commodity, removed from pastoral use. Local government tended to remove such areas from the banner jurisdiction and place them under Chinese administration, even if the agriculturalists were Mongols.

The nationalist Guomindang administration (1927–31) discarded the five coloured flag and became openly assimulationist in its policies. 'Special Administrative Areas' were created, reaching into Inner Mongolia and linking Mongolian regions with the Chinese provinces immediately to the south. This process went a step further in 1929 when the Guomindang government organised Inner Mongolia into 'standard' Chinese provinces (Jehol, Chahar, and Suiyuan), so eliminating Inner Mongolia as a separate administrative territory at a stroke. In practice the areas not yet reached by Chinese colonisation remained under the administration of their own princes. But new land was turned over to Chinese settlers year by year and

then brought under Chinese provincial government, rather than Mongol banner, administration, even if there were large numbers of Mongols in the districts.

Alongside the old aristocratic leadership a new political elite was emerging in Inner Mongolia, the product of secular state-oriented educational establishments. In the late nineteenth century elements of the aristocracy had seen the need for new sorts of training in a rapidly changing world. Prince Gungsangnorbu of Kharachin, for example, was one of the most prominent advocates of the peaceful reform and transformation of the 'feudal' social order. Impressed by the Japanese experience, Gungsangnorbu attempted to establish an education system to produce the modernising elites of the future (Narangoa 2001). The Inner Mongolian groups which most rapidly entered this movement were from the Kharachin and Khorchin banners in eastern Inner Mongolia and the Tümed banners in the west. Familiar with bureaucracy and the Chinese language, the elite of these regions were well placed to play a part in the new political movements emerging in China, and they supplied many of the students for the Mongolian-Tibetan Academy that Prince Gungsangnorbu established in Beijing. Many of these became involved in the Communist and Nationalist political movements that were emerging in Beijing, and the associated political initiatives and manoeuvrings in Inner Mongolia. One of several small political parties formed at this time was the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which looked towards Soviet-sponsored Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic) for inspiration, but it did not win much effective support, and became important only later, as a historical artefact.

## WAR AND THE COMMUNIST UNITED FRONT

Strangely enough, the swamping of the Mongolians by Chinese settlement that Lattimore had predicted was averted, or at least delayed, by the Sino-Japanese and Civil wars. Having taken control of Manchuria in 1931–32 the Japanese began to extend their sphere of influence into eastern Inner Mongolia, seizing Jehol in 1933.[10]

[10] That year Inner Mongolian leaders held a conference at Bailingmiao (Bat-haalag monastery) to launch a movement for Inner Mongolian autonomy. This movement included both radical and conservative Inner Mongolian leaders, and the

Their policies were designed to favour Mongol interests in an attempt to mobilise support against China, and they courted Inner Mongolian nationalists such as Prince Demchugdongrub.[11] With Japanese backing an autonomous Inner Mongolian government was established under Prince Demchugdongrub in 1936–37, later taking the name Mengjiang. This split Inner Mongolia, since the western part remained in the hands of the Chinese warlord and governor of Suiyuan, General Fu Zuoyi.

As the war unfolded, Inner Mongolia became a strategically important region. The Long March had finally led the Chinese Communists to a sanctuary in northern Shaanxi province, right on the border with the Suiyuan administration of General Fu Zuoyi. A sinicised Mongolian communist named Yun Ze rose to prominence at this time.

Yun Ze was one of a number of young men from the Tümed region of Inner Mongolia sent to Prince Gungsangnorbu's Mongolian-Tibetan Academy in Beijing, and seems to have been one of the earliest recruits of the Chinese Communist Party, which he joined in 1925 when he was sent to study in the Soviet Union. Around 1930 he returned to Inner Mongolia to try to mobilise support for the Communists, and in 1935 he joined the staff of General Fu Zuoyi, the Suiyuan warlord, fighting the Japanese. Four years later he made his way to the Communist base in Shaanxi and become a senior figure at the Minorities Institute there, training a core of politically active Mongolians. Yun Ze later took the name Ulanhu (or Ulanfu in Chinese) as his *nom de guerre*, and became a central figure in the development of the CCP's policies towards 'minority nationalities' (*shaoshu minzu*). The Party was keen to attract Mongolian allies using a version of the Soviet nationalities policy, and since the 1920s both the Communists and the Guomindang Nationalists had begun to hold out the hope of some

---

figure to emerge at the head of the conservative nationalist movement was Prince Demchugdongrub. The Chinese National Government in Nanking, however, would not agree to the high level of autonomy for Inner Mongolia proposed by the Bailingmiao conference (Jagchid 1988: 247).

[11] The Mongolian Autonomy Movement and the administrative body for Inner Mongolian self-rule (the Mongolian Political Council of 1934-36) disintegrated in the face of internal division and Japanese military advances, some elements to fight the Japanese, and others such as Prince Demchugdongrub, to seek an accommodation with them.

sort of autonomy for China's border nationalities.[12] In 1930 the CCP had promised that it would recognize the rights of minority nationalities to secede from China if they wished, and in 1935 Mao Zedong pledged to return Inner Mongolia to the Mongols. Associated as they were with warlord governments, the Guomindang seem to have been less able to convince Mongol activists of their sincerity, and the communists' nationality policy appears to have won them a certain amount of support among the politically radical Mongol nationalists.

When the Soviet army drove the Japanese out of Inner Mongolia and Manchuria in 1945, the Japanese-sponsored administration of Mongol regions formed the East Mongolian Autonomous Government (EMAG) led by Khafungga, an intellectual from Khorchin banner. With Japan defeated the EMAG was politically in a weak position and Ulanhu was able to pressure its leadership into joining the communist administration he had formed in the west. He founded the unified Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in 1947—delivering control of a large territory to the communists well before their national victory in 1949. Officials and political activists now joined the new communist victors. Many, of course, were left-wing activists who had been working covertly against the Japanese, others were Mongol nationalists who had hoped Japanese sponsorship might lead to independence, or just local administrators who had co-operated, to some extent, with the occupying force. The result was two sets of CCP cadres, Ulanhu's Mongols, from the west of the region, and the eastern Mongols from EMAG. In the new accommodation Ulanhu headed the unified Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region administration, with the ex-EMAG Khafungga as his deputy.[13]

---

[12] The Chinese Communist Party's co-founders, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, seem to have supported independence for minority regions. The second congress of the party in 1922, distinguished 'China proper' (*Zhongguo benbu*) from the rest of the former Qing empire and offered Mongolia, Tibet and Huijiang democratic autonomous statehood with a federal system. By 1938, however, the right to secession had been dropped; but the Party had retained a commitment to respect the rights of minorities and to establish some sort of autonomous government in minority regions (Atwood 2002: 293–94; 2004: 247).

[13] Even at this time Ulanhu did not directly control more than a small part of Inner Mongolia, but had gained the support of other local Mongolian leaders that had emerged, such as the Soviet-Mongolian trained Wulji Ochar (Ölzii Ochir) who controlled much of the Shilingol region.

## THE AUTONOMOUS REGION AS FIEFDOM

Ulanhu's usefulness to the CCP allowed him to win a special place—geographically and politically—for Mongols and other national minorities. Over the next nine years a huge area of land was allocated to the new Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR), and Ulanhu became its de facto ruler as chairman of its party committee and commander of its military. He was also an Alternate Member of the Politburo of the CCP, and in 1954 he became the Vice-Premier of the People's Republic of China. This extraordinary concentration of power in the hands of one man, and its legacy, profoundly influenced the history of Inner Mongolian politics

The notion of a privileged place for the Mongol 'nationality' (*minzu*) in the Autonomous Region was a fundamental element of the political platform that gave Ulanhu and his appointees such a concentration of power. Mongols were over-represented in the party and government system. By the mid 1950's, although they only accounted for about 15% of the 7.5 million people living in the IMAR, Mongols occupied four of the five positions as CCP regional secretaries, for example.[14] Mongolian gained parity with Chinese as an official language in the region, with newspapers and state documents printed in both languages. Mongolian education, media and cultural institutions were installed as part of the state establishment and this provided a huge base of cadre positions that were, in effect, reserved for Mongols. Ulanhu won very considerable autonomy in interpreting central CCP policy. He argued that policies in the autonomous region should be specifically adapted to the needs of the Mongolian nationality.[15]

---

[14] In 1912 there had been something over one and a half million Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia and about 875,000 Mongols (Bulag 2004: 87; Ma 1993: 193). By 2003 the number of Han had risen to almost nineteen million, making the Han the overwhelming majority of the region's population. However, the Mongols have certainly not been 'wiped out' as Lattimore predicted; there were more than four million living in the region by the early twenty-first century. If Lattimore (1934: 25) was accurate in his estimate of three million Mongols living in the territories of what is now the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in the 1930s, then the current population is not so impressive. Official Chinese government statistics, however, show a very low Mongol population in the region in 1947, just 832,000. By this count the Mongol population has increased relatively rapidly under communist administration.

[15] His reform policies, for example, were known as the 'Three Don'ts and Two Favourables' (*San Bu Liang Li*). This stood for 'Don't settle scores with herd-

The 1953 'Programme for Enforcement of National Regional Autonomy' had declared that the governments of national minority regions would be composed 'principally' of national minority peoples. In the Chinese Constitution of 1954, however, this had been diluted so that the governments were to include only an 'appropriate' number of national minority representatives. Nevertheless, the legacy of these concessions is found in article 114 of the (1982) Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which states that:

> The administrative head of an autonomous region, prefecture or county shall be a citizen of the nationality, or of one of the nationalities, exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned.

In effect, Ulanhu was able to develop his own variety of PRC policy, importantly different from those of the Han regions. These first waves of revolutionary changes were officially described as the 'democratic reform' period *min zhu gai ge* in Chinese, or *ardchilsan öörchlölt* in Mongolian. In China as a whole this was a period of brutal land reform, 'class war' and persecution of the rich. But reform was described as slow or soft in the areas Ulanhu controlled directly. Even Buddhist monasteries were left largely untouched and lamas allowed to practise under licence. However, this was only really true of the western part of the region. In the eastern territories, which had been controlled by the Japanese, the old elite suffered from a brief but traumatic period of Soviet occupation and much harsher levels of Chinese Communist suppression. Partly this was because so many there could be targeted as Japanese collaborators, whereas the western regions had never come under Japanese control; and partly this was because it had taken time for Ulanhu to extend effective control over what had become the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, and at first the eastern territories had come under the more zealous communist control of Lin Biao's North-East China Bureau.

These very different experiences of the war with Japan and subsequent communist reform helped explain the differences between the Eastern and Western factions within the post-revolutionary Mongolian elite. The Western faction were principally made up of Tümed Mongols from Ulanhu's birthplace near Hohhot (once Guisui), the region's new capital. As Ulanhu promoted

owners,' 'Don't distribute herd-owners' livestock,' 'Don't determine the class status of herdsmen,' and 'Be favourable to both the hired herdsman and the herd-owner.'

members of his personal and extended network, the upper echelons of the party and government tended to fill with these ‘western’ Tümeds. But demographically, Inner Mongolia’s centre of gravity lay further east, which had much larger concentrations of Mongolian as well as Chinese populations, and Eastern Inner Mongol cadres remained an important element of the Party and local government structures. The East Mongol Khafungga was, after all, the deputy chairman of the Autonomous Government, at least at first. But the careers of the former EMAG cadres were often handicapped by their association with Japanese collaboration and the notion that they were newcomers to the CCP cause. Khafungga only joined the Party in 1946, for example, and in 1954 he was effectively demoted to head of education policy (Atwood 2004: 299).

Although his policies favoured a particular construction of Mongol national interests, Ulanhu actually led a decidedly mixed administration, including many Han in senior positions. Ulanhu’s other Deputy had been the Han Chinese Yang Zhilin (Bulag 2004: 97), for example, and other senior Han officials later included Wang Yilun, the Vice-Chairman of IMAR, and Liu Qing, the Deputy Commander of the Inner Mongolia Military Region Political Department. Indeed Ulanhu was himself so sinicised that he had virtually forgotten the Mongolian language and had to relearn it in later life.

The Maoist wing of the Party disapproved of Ulanhu’s ‘soft’ approach to reform and the ‘suspect’ class background of many of those around him, who owed their positions to their roles in the wartime United Front or post-war accommodation. Ulanhu could not prevent his critics from accusing Mongolian cadres of nationalism and rightism. In 1956 a campaign to ‘correct the style’ of cadres led to the Socialist Education Movement and national anti-Rightist campaign. By the time these finished in 1957 the Inner Mongolian Communist Party Committee had been purged of half its members and 32,000 Inner Mongolian cadres were ‘sent down’ to rural districts for compulsory re-education (Shirendyb and Sladkovskiy 1980: 95–99).

It would be too simplistic to view this intra-Party conflict as a struggle between Han and Mongol ethnic interests. It is true to say that the Maoist element of the Party had a more assimulationist stance than Ulanhu, but his critics were not exclusively Han; they included some radical Mongols (such as Ulaanbagan and Wu Tao),

mostly from eastern Inner Mongolia. The real bases of the two platforms were ideological and historical, since they represented different agendas for the evaluation of those fit to hold power. The Maoist faction made much of the notion that leadership positions should be held by those with a sound class background, while the Ulanhu bloc had emerged from more pragmatic appointments made in the course of winning the Civil War. But since this became a struggle over whose people were advanced in the administration, loyalty to their respective leaders was perhaps the most important consideration for both factions. The two groups had advances and retreats; the Maoists won some ground around the time of the Great Leap Forward, but Ulanhu, like other 'White' or 'Expert' elements of the Party, reasserted some control in the early 1960s, after the GLF's failure. The tide of Chinese colonists seems to have increased when Maoist policies were ascendant, and declined somewhat when Ulaanhu was able to reassert control (Sneath 2000: 98–101; Atwood 2004: 249). But throughout the period the flow of Han settlers into what had been Mongol lands continued.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The struggle between Ulanhu and his Maoist opponents came to a climax during the Cultural Revolution. In the early 1960s worsening Sino-Soviet relations placed Inner Mongolia on the front line against the potentially hostile Soviet forces in (Outer) Mongolia. Ulanhu had enjoyed relatively good relations with both the Soviets and their Mongolian allies, and the CCP leadership seems to have begun to suspect his loyalty. A Party campaign to better identify exploiters and "redraw class lines" alleged that Ulanhu's Tumet Mongols had been privileged in the land-reform campaigns (Atwood 2004: 250). In 1965 the CCP centre in Beijing called for a campaign to uncover agents of 'Soviet-Mongol revisionism' (Shirendyb and Sladkovskiy 1980: 105). Ulanhu began to reinforce his own position and in 1966 moved some of his trusted officials (all Tümed Mongols) into leading positions in the regional government (Bulag 2004: 98). In May 1966 the CCP's North China Party Bureau convened a two-month meeting of senior officials concerned with Inner Mongolia at the Qianmen Hotel in Beijing. Their principle target was Ulanhu, and his foes in the Inner Mongolian administration were encouraged to

speak out against him. Liu Shaoqi accused him of having failed to "carry out class struggle, in particular among the Mongolian population" (Woody 1993: ii). This identified Ulanhu and his circle as targets for the militant Red Guard groups that were forming in Hohhot and elsewhere in response to Mao's call to "bombard the headquarters"—that is, to attack those he considered 'reactionaries' in Party and government as part of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

As the Red Guards mobilised to topple him, Ulanhu and his Han and Mongol supporters in the establishment organized counter demonstrations and rival 'mass organisations' and there were clashes in the streets in the summer of 1966. Mongols found themselves on both sides. Western, particularly Tümed, Mongols in Party and government were associated with Ulanhu. Their natural opponents among Mongolian cadres tended to be the eastern Mongols, such as the well-educated Khorchin and Kharachin Mongols.

In August Ulanhu was dismissed from his Party posts and denounced as a 'capitalist roader', and in November he was removed from his remaining positions of power and placed under house arrest. But the chaos of the Cultural Revolution continued, spreading to rural districts. Red Guards and rival organisations continued to clash and public order began to collapse. In early 1967 Liu Qing, a Han military commander and supporter of Ulanhu, ordered troops into Hohhot to arrest Red Guards. The situation was not tolerated for long by the CCP centre and in April 1967 Beijing ordered a General named Teng Haiqing to move into Inner Mongolia to take control of the region.

The nationwide chaos that had been generated by the Cultural Revolution began to concern even the Maoist Party leadership. In September Mao called on the army to restore order and new Revolutionary Committees, largely under military control, were introduced to replace the fragmented local government throughout China. In November General Teng formed the Inner Mongolian Revolutionary Committee.

This form of military rule brought Beijing's concerns about Mongolian separatism and pro-Soviet treachery to the fore. The Revolutionary Committee encouraged an inquisitorial taskforce dedicated to 'dragging out traitors' headed by an east Mongol cadre named Ulaanbagan. In 1968 the Revolutionary Committee alleged that they had uncovered an enormous plot, led by Ulanhu, to split

Inner Mongolia from China and join the Mongolian People's Republic. Their 'evidence' for this included confessions extracted by brutal methods of 'enhanced interrogation', to use the current jargon. It was claimed that the small pro-Soviet Mongolian independence party of the 1920s, the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, had been revived in secret by Ulanhu and used to penetrate Party and government structures throughout the region. The campaign to uproot the New IMPRP, whose name was shortened to Nei Ren Dang in Chinese, became a vast, self-sustaining witch-hunt, fuelled by the forced confessions of suspects. Virtually all Mongols in any sort of position of responsibility became suspects, and this usually meant interrogation to find the names of others involved in the plot.

In the early part of the Cultural Revolution most of the conflict had occurred in the cities, but Red Guards started to arrive in the countryside in 1967–68, and the disturbances began to spread to rural districts. The Red Guards were looking for targets and at first generally found them in the various 'class enemies' (formerly rich officials or lamas), who had been identified and made to suffer in earlier campaigns. These they subjected to frequently brutal 'struggle sessions' where the victims would typically be made to stand in the painful 'aeroplane' position (doubled over with their arms raised behind them), beaten and made to confess their 'crimes'. In regions where Buddhist monasteries were still operating these were generally destroyed and any remaining lamas persecuted.

With the launch of the anti-Nei Ren Dang campaign taskforces were despatched to rural settlements to hunt for traitors and the scope of potential targets for Red Guard action suddenly widened to include almost every Mongolian. Woody (1993: 19) notes that in 1968 members of the Revolutionary Committee, themselves alarmed by the snowballing scale of the campaign, wrote to General Teng to report the population of whole villages running in terror at the approach of a vehicle that might be bringing a team hunting for Nei Ren Dang members. The scale and intensity of the brutality increased: Mongolian suspects might be beaten to death, thrown from high buildings, or face any number of savage punishments, such as having gunpowder forced up their nostrils and ignited (Sneath 2000: 117).

This climate of terror promoted a Maoist version of Han assimulationism. Any display of Mongolian culture could be seized

upon by the inquisitors as evidence of Mongolian nationalism and separatism. To wear Mongol clothing rather than the conformist revolutionary Chinese suit became dangerous. In February 1968 General Teng announced that, “the enemy is using religion and plays upon national feeling in order to bring disaster to the great Cultural Revolution” (Shirendyb and Sladkovskiy 1980: 118). Religious Mongolians and surviving lamas were targeted again as a result.

The destruction and chaos of the Cultural Revolution eventually convinced the CCP to bring it to an end. In April 1969 the Ninth Party Congress declared victory for the Cultural Revolution and began to consider its ‘excesses’. General Teng was dismissed and it was agreed that the anti-Nei Ren Dang campaign had gone ‘too far’.

In 1979 the Inner Mongolia Communist Party Committee calculated that among the minority nationalities (about 85% of whom were Mongolians) more than 346,000 people had been ‘uprooted’ as members of the Nei Ren Dang, which represents something like one in three of the adult population. In this campaign, the committee noted, 16,222 people were killed, 87,188 were crippled, and over one million people were affected in one way or other. The Party later admitted to 22,900 people killed in the Cultural Revolution as a whole (Woody 1993: 30–31), but like the figures given for the anti-Nei Ren Dang campaign, these figures are commonly thought to be an underestimate (Atwood 2004: 250).

This campaign, which led to a period of widespread ethnic persecution, left deep scars for almost every Mongol family in the region, and is the basis for the charge of genocide that is made by the Inner Mongolian separatists groups in the USA. One of these groups undoubtedly chose its name—The Inner Mongolian People’s Party—in memory of the anti-Nei Ren Dang campaign.

## A NEW ACCOMMODATION: THE HU YAOBANG ERA

After the fall of the Gang of Four or Five in 1976, a new post-Mao leadership emerged, eventually to be led by Deng Xiaoping. Ulanhu returned to high political office. In 1977 he became a Politburo member and his influence soon became apparent. In 1978 the CCP Central Committee issued a document stating that the New Inner Mongolia People’s Party had simply never existed, and in 1979 the Inner Mongolia Party Committee officially declared that the cases

against Ulanhu and the Nei Ren Dang had been unjust, false and fabricated, overturning the verdicts against those accused. Also in 1979 the parts of Inner Mongolia that had been hived-off to neighbouring provinces during the paranoia of the Sino-Soviet split were restored, and IMAR regained its earlier territories. In 1983 Ulanhu became the Vice-President of China and his son, Buhe, was appointed chairman of IMAR. This period marked the return to power of many of the survivors of Ulanhu's circle. All his other children became important officials, for example, and many of those in senior positions shared Ulanhu's surname—Yün.

Buhe was never allowed to wield as much power as his father, however. As chairman of the IMAR he embodied the special place of the Mongolian nationality in the administration of the region and reflected the Party's newfound policy that the head of the local government of an autonomous region should be of the indigenous nationality. But the position was thought of as having more symbolic than political importance. The new CCP leadership instituted a separation of administrative, military and Party posts in Inner Mongolia, and was careful to include a good many Han and east Mongol cadres in the administration. Much of the real power in the region was wielded by the First Secretary of the Communist Party and since the Cultural Revolution this post has always been held by a Han Chinese.

In the 1980s, however, the CCP Centre, headed by General Secretary Hu Yaobang, was receptive to the notion of policies designed to appeal to minority nationalities.[16] Several of Ulanhu's old policies were revived. The official patronage of Mongolian culture and language was reinstated, as was some measure of the early administration's tolerance of Lamaism. Several monasteries reopened and lamas and worshippers began to return. The new administration also revived their advocacy of pastoralism, which they portrayed as the primary economy of both the region and the Mongolian nation.

In retrospect, the Hu Yaobang era in the 1980s can be seen as the second high tide of Mongol cadre representation. The discourse of national minorities as discrete, ethno-political constituencies, which

[16] One of Hu Yaobang's associates was a Jirem Mongolian, Altan-Ochir, who was said to have been a classmate of Hu's in Moscow in the 1930s. Altan-Ochir rose to become Vice-Secretary of the Central Chinese Communist Youth League, and in the late 1980s he became Vice-Chairman of the IMAR government.

required their own political and cultural representation, was revived. The ideology of the Mongols as an essentially pastoral people generated local policies to support pastoralism. Mongolian districts tended to be officially designated ‘pastoral’ or ‘semi-pastoral’, even when they were largely agricultural, so investment in ‘the pastoral sector’ tended to enhance resources and promote opportunities for cadres from Mongolian regions.

At the height of the Hu Yaobang era, in 1985–87, the IMAR Party head, and *de facto* leader of the administration, was Zhang Shuguang. Zhang placed special emphasis on supporting pastoralism in the region, and in early 1986 he launched a vision for the future *da mu ye* (the great pastoral economy). This economy included pastoralism, forestry, and (in a supporting role) agriculture. The new policy had two sets of eight-word Chinese slogans, *nian cao mu jing, xing xu mu ye* (chant the doctrine of grass and tree, develop the pastoral economy), and *lin mu wei zhu, duo zhong jing ying* (forestry and pastoralism should be central, manage various types of economy). These initiatives benefited pastoral regions, which received increased investment from the Agricultural Bank of China, boosted local government budgets, and generated a climate of optimism among many Mongols, since the pastoral economy was seen as symbolic of Mongol interests in general.

In around 1987, however, Zhang was replaced Wang Qun. This was seen as a reflection of changes in Beijing, since Hu Yaobang had been replaced as General Party Secretary by Zhao Ziyang, and Wang Qun was seen as one of Zhao Ziyang’s men. Policy began to change again, reflecting the new leadership’s priority of rapid economic development. Wang introduced a new policy which retained one of the four-word couplets of the previous administration, *yin di zhi yi, duo zhong jing ying* (adapt to the particular local situation, manage various types of economy). This apparently subtle change had important implications and seemed to mark a reverse of the earlier promotion of Mongol cadre interests. Wang’s administration favoured various economic activities, such as commerce, mining and small-scale industry, which were seen as primarily Han domains.

The CCP Centre ensured that no one faction of the administration could build up the sort of power that Ulanhu and his Tümeds had. In 1992 Buhe was replaced by a new chairman, Ulji (Ölzii), an Eastern Mongolian. In the new climate the importance of the West Tümed cadres diminished, as did the number of senior officials with

Ulanhu's original clan name of Yun. This was reversed again in the late 1990s when a West Mongol, Yun Bulong, was appointed. As Bulag (2004: 95) notes, in 2000 the new chairman's death in a freak accident caused a crisis in succession since the next candidate had not been selected. It took two months for the CCP centre to settle on their choice, this time a woman from outside IMAR, a Mongol from the Eastern Liaoning province named Uyunqimg (Oyunchimeg). The pattern was repeated when, in 2004, she was replaced by Yang Jing from the Western Ordos region.

Despite the continuing and symbolically important policy of selecting Mongols for the role of head of the IMAR government, the attitude of the administration towards the old construction of Mongolian nationality interest has continued to disappoint many Mongol cadres. Throughout the 1990s the emphasis has been on promoting 'market socialism' and the rapid growth of commerce and industry, both largely Han domains. In the mushrooming Chinese business sector nationality status counts for very little.

## THE DE-POLITICIZED MINORITY NATIONALITY

The current 'state consumerist' phase of China's development has created a new space for minority 'culture' within an integrationist process which is, ironically enough, expressed in a discourse of multi-culturalism. With the shift to what the state discourse calls the 'problems of well-off society', China's consumer boom creates a continuous requirement for consumer items, and minority culture has become one of these—catering to the huge internal tourist market, as well as serving as a language of distinctiveness for commodity production. Newly rebuilt temples and monasteries, tourist villages and encampments offer a commoditised vision of minority culture for the visitor. The recent reconstruction of the Chinggis Khaan temple in Khinggan League, for example, is built in the standard architectural style for minority nationality buildings and is staffed almost entirely by Han personnel, who offer commentary only in Chinese. Understandably enough, this has not been popular among Mongols.

The place for the newly marketable culture is alongside 'tradition' and 'heritage' as a politically neutral matter of leisure and business. Images of the exotic—national costume, handicrafts, music—take

their place in a safely contained annex to the naturalised mainstream of 'modern' China. This new place for minority nationality culture may be highly visible, but it is largely depoliticized, in that the discursive space that it now occupies largely precludes it from becoming the basis for political action. In the 1980s, for example, so powerful was the potential recasting of minority nationality perceived to be, that a Mongolian student movement aimed at reclaiming the "high level of regional autonomy" promised in the original CCP policy was taken very seriously and powerfully repressed by the authorities. But in the present climate these are seen as increasingly irrelevant issues. In recent years it appears as if the old notion of minority nationalities, and the political position that Ulanhu constructed for them, is being dismantled. As with so many other shifts, this is embodied in economic policy.

In 2003 the IMAR administration launched a new policy, the construction of a Great National Cultural Region, in which the 'cultural enterprise' is to thrive. Each of the regions of Inner Mongolia has its own 'regional brand'—such as Red Mountain Culture for Chifeng and Chinggis Khaan Mausoleum-centred Ordos Culture. Simultaneously, a geographical identity has been launched to supersede the ethno-linguistic minority nationality category itself. "The Inner Mongolian Steppe Culture," the deputy Mayor of Hohhot explained in a recent (2004) public speech, "is a general name of a material civilisation and spiritual civilisation which have been created by people of all the nationalities of Inner Mongolia, and all the ethnic groups." This 'melting pot' culture is represented as having always been part of a China that is pictured as the current geographic entity projected back through history, and the basis for a new political identity—the Steppe Nationality. As the deputy mayor said, neatly marrying assimulationist and tourist agendas, "Our Steppe nationality is the most warm and hospitable of peoples […]. Please come to our steppe." (Hurelbaatar 2006: 6–7)

This reflects the national trend to revive regionalism by way of constructing distinctive provincial identities. As Tim Oakes (2000: 678) puts it:

> Provincial identities in China, then, are not contemporary manifestations of China's native-place tradition, geared up for a new global presence. Rather, they are ideological appropriations and reinventions of that tradition, with a number of specific goals in mind. Most recognizable among these is economic development through

> attracting mobile external capital. 'Competitive liberalization' compels regional elites to develop whatever resources are necessary to put themselves in the pathways of capital.

This may be a national trend, but seen from the vantage point of a minority nationality region we see something more. The new local 'brand' identities seem to preclude the possibility of uniting the old Mongol nationality cadre powerbase. Moreover, the Steppe Culture, just like the Yellow River Culture and the Changjiang (Yangtse) River Culture is one of the three great cradles of Chinese civilisation (Hurelbaatar 2006: 6). In this historical construction Chinese civilisation includes steppes that might stretch from Manchuria to Central Asia. It is perhaps no coincidence that this de-ethnicised vision of history configured around the nascent superpower state is emerging at a time when China is beginning to extend its sphere of economic influence beyond its borders once again.

## LAND, ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In 2000 the Chinese state launched a new policy of compulsory population relocation, ostensibly designed to relieve poverty and protect the environment. This 'ecological migration' (*shengtai yimin*) entailed the forcible relocation of rural populations from regions classed as 'ecologically vulnerable ' and it has been carried out on a vast scale.

Inner Mongolia has become a particular target of these ecological migration policies, largely because of its proximity to Beijing. Over 60% of the region has been classified as ecologically vulnerable and the environmental degradation and desertification of the Inner Mongolian steppelands has been blamed for the increasingly severe sandstorms (*shachenbao*) that began to badly effect Beijing, Tienjin and Tangshan in the late 1990s. The Chinese state held this to have been caused by the indigenous pastoral population overgrazing the fragile grasslands, and has set out to clear away the rural populations across vast swathes of Inner Mongolia to the north of the capital.

In 2002 plans were drawn up to displace 650,000 Inner Mongolians by 2008. In the eighteen months from July 2001 to December 2003, one fifth of all Inner Mongolian pasture land was ruled out of bounds to pastoralists, and 200,000 herdsmen were displaced. The

most severely effected region has been Shilingol league, most of which has been, until recently, inhabited by Mongol pastoralists. From 2002 to 2005 over 40,000 pastoralists were relocated to new settlements and urban centres, some 20% of the entire pastoral population, and this process is continuing. In 2002 the league government launched a huge new campaign called Enclose and Transfer (*wei feng zhuan yi*) designed to entirely eradicate traditional mobile pastoralism by 2010 and resettle the majority of pastoralists in new or existing centres.[17]

Since the decollectivisation of the rural economy in the early 1980s, Inner Mongolian rural society had been subject to policies ostensibly designed to manage pastoralism so as to protect the steppe environment. In order to prevent a supposed 'tragedy of the commons' threat to grazing land, for example, when the Peoples Communes were disbanded in the 1980s, the open access pastureland was divided into individual allocations for herding households, almost as if they were smallholder agriculturalists. This destroyed the wide systems of pastoral movement that had historically thrived on the steppe. A number of studies have suggested that these policies, by destroying earlier systems of mobile land use, have actually accelerated pastoral degradation and desertification (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Williams 2002).

In the face of these historic failures, the new mass relocation programme represents a sort of 'final solution' to the problem of managing Inner Mongolian pastoral land use—moving pastoralists off the land altogether. This has caused widespread discontent among the largely Mongol population of pastoral districts, and is slowly gaining some limited regional and international attention. Some NGOs within China have established websites to publicise the negative effects of these policies and to advocate herders' rights. In Inner Mongolia a group with the Chinese name *Ceng Jing Cao Yuan* (Once Upon The Steppe) has formed, based in Shilingol, and seems to have a largely Mongol membership. However, there is also a Beijing-based group, apparently Han Chinese, calling itself *Hang Hai Sha* (Sand of the Dry Sea), which is also campaigning against the relocation policies.

---

[17] See Li Xin, *Xinhua News* 1st July, 2003.

## CONCLUSION

Inner Mongolia has been an arena of conflict and contest throughout the twentieth century, not only between Japanese, Han and Mongol interests, but also between different Mongol groups—East and West Mongols, Maoist and Rightist factions of the CCP and so on. This history of conflict reflects the struggle for power between factions of the various ruling elites, both Han and Mongol. These may have mobilised the discourse of ethno-national identity, but they have had their own dynamics. They emerge from a particular history, which is as much to do with the nature and control of state administrative structures as with local identity. The factions and interest groups were usually mixed. Mongol aristocracy were key players in the land-grab of the early twentieth century, as were Han cadres in the Hu Yaobang era of *minzu* sponsorship. As a result, the special status afforded the Mongolian nationality has been continuously reconfigured in the waves of political changes that have effected the region since the Communist victory in 1947.

In retrospect, we see a series of available discourses used in the political struggles of the twentieth-century elites. Firstly, in the United Front era, nationalities appear as participatory publics in revolution, within which minority cadres have the role of mobilising supporters for the communist cause. With communist victory, Ulanhu sought to represent the *minzu* as distinctive societies requiring appropriate representation by minority cadres for effective administration; while for the Maoist assimulationists they were merely the various traditional backgrounds of the revolutionary masses in their advance towards communism, to be guided by cadres of any nationality. And now, in the era of market socialism, *minzu* identities appear as a 'cultural resource' in an increasingly integrated consumer society.

The importance of land and its control continually resurfaces throughout this history. The central importance of territory for the national state fuelled Chinese colonisation throughout the twentieth century and remains central to the newer discourse of modernist environmentalism in which the state becomes the steward of the sacred national land. The strengthening sense of a strong and unified nation seems somehow reflected in both the prioritization of land over citizen, and the new geographical-environmental identity, which is being advanced to eclipse the old ethno-national *minzu* concept.

These appear to be mutually reinforcing constructs—in the new vision the steppe environment both defines its human inhabitants and requires protection from them. It speaks, through science, to a Chinese state that is bound to act responsibly to protect it.

Having noted this, it is clear that the older notions of ethno-national identity remain strong, and it is far too early to declare them redundant; they continue to frame administrative policy in the IMAR. It remains to be seen to what extent local elites begin to make use of law to resist particular policies, such as the ecological migration resettlement programmes. It is interesting to note that, again, what protest there is to these policies seems to involve both Han and Mongol activists.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An early version of this paper was presented at the international conference *Conflict, religion and social order in Tibet and Inner Asia*, 18–19 November 2005, Humboldt University, Berlin. The author is grateful for the comments of the conference participants.

## REFERENCES

Atwood, Christopher 2002. *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades 1911–1931*. Leiden: Brill.

—— 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. New York: Facts on File.

Barfield, Thomas 1989. *The perilous frontier: nomadic empires and China.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Bulag, Uradyn 2004. Inner Mongolia: The dialectics of colonization and ethnicity building. *In* M. Rossabi (ed.) *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Chang Chenhua, Yan Yishen and Chang Neijun 1930. *China's Inner Mongolia*, (trans.) Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People's Publishing House.

Di Cosmo, Nicola 2002. *Ancient China and its enemies: The rise of nomadic power in East Asian history.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gellner, Ernest 1983. *Nations and Nationalism.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Heissig, Walther 1972. Some new information on peasant revolts and people's uprisings in Eastern (Inner) Mongolia in the $19^{th}$ Century (1861–1901). *In* J. Hangin and U. Onon (eds), *Analecta Mongolica; dedicated to the seventieth birthday of Professor Owen Lattimore*. Bloomington, Ind: Mongolia Society.

Humphrey, Caroline and David Sneath 1999. *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Hurelbaatar, A. 2006. 'Creating super-ethnic identity and local identities in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, China.' Unpublished research paper, Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, Cambridge UK.

Jagchid, Sechin 1988. *Essays in Mongolian Studies*. Provo, Utah: David M. Kennedy Centre for International Studies, Brigham Young University.

Lattimore, Owen 1934. *The Mongols of Manchuria*. New York: The John Day Company.

—— 1962. [1935] *Studies in Frontier History. Collected papers 1928–1958*. London: Oxford University Press.

Lee, Robert 1970. *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History*. Princeton: Harvard University Press.

Litzinger, Ralph 2002. Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1): 37–58.

Ma, Rong 1993. Migrant and ethnic integration in the process of socio-economic change in Inner Mongolia, China; a village study. *Nomadic Peoples*, 33: 193–208.

Munkh-Erdene, Lhamsuren 2006. The Mongolian nationality lexicon: From the Chinggisid lineage to Mongolian nationality (From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century). *Inner Asia*, 8(1): 51–98.

Narangoa, Li 2001. Educating Mongols and Making 'Citizens' of Manchukuo. *Inner Asia*, 3(1): 101–26.

Oakes, Tim 2000. China's Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing "Chineseness". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59(3): 667–92.

Shirendyb, B. and M.I. Sladkovskiy (eds), 1980. *Avtonomniy Raion Vnutrenniaia Mongoliia Kitaiskoy Narodnoy Respubliki*, (The Situation of the Mongolian Nationality in Inner Mongolia). Moscow: Nauka.

Sneath, David 2000. *Changing Inner Mongolia; Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Dee 2002. *Beyond great walls: environment, identity, and development on the Chinese grasslands of Inner Mongolia.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Woody, W. 1993. The Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia: Extracts from an Unpublished History, M. Schoenhals (trans. and ed.) Occasional Paper 20. Stockholm: Centre for Pacific Asia Studies, Stockholm University.

Yu, P.K. (ed.) 1972. *Documents on Inner Mongolia: Selected U.S. Intelligence Reports (declassified) on Leaders and Factions in Inner Mongolia 1946–1949.* Washington D.C: Centre for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, Xerox Reproduction Centre.

# THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: GENDER, AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MAOIST VIOLENCE IN AMDO

CHARLENE MAKLEY

## AMA DROLMA'S REFUSAL

Since Deng Xiaoping's post-Mao reforms in the early 1980s, the famous Tibetan Buddhist monastery town of Labrang in China's northwest has been vigorously revitalizing in conjunction with the rise of a tourism industry serving Han Chinese urbanites and foreign travellers. That process is contributing to the (re)emergence of the town as an important urbanizing market node on the edge of the high grassland plateaus, the erstwhile Sino-Tibetan frontier zone. The Labrang region is now administered as Xiahe county seat in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu province, China. From its founding in the early eighteenth century to its forcible closure under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1958, the massive Geluk sect Buddhist monastery, figured locally as the mandala palace of the Jamyang Shepa lineage of incarnate lamas, was a multiethnic centre of higher learning and a Tibetan polity governing hundreds of nomad and farmer patron communities in the surrounding mountains.

During my fieldwork there in the mid-1990s, and again in the summer of 2002, I found that the past was a heavy, and very often hidden, burden for locals. This was not readily apparent amidst the bustling public market activities in town and in monastic tourist spaces, but this is a population living with unsanctioned memories of the traumatic ruptures of the Chinese Communist revolution, memories, that is, which conflict with official history. For them, the 'unsaid' of history spoke loudly in implication—in implied dialogue with multimedia official histories, in the gaps in written and oral chronologies of events, in the revived performance of the lay and monastic ritual calendars, and in the dodges and silences of my Tibetan interlocutors during our many conversations about their pasts. "I don't know anything! I'm too young, you know!" (Tib. *ngas*

*shes ni ma red, nga lo chung gi mo*). Ama Drolma, a village matriarch in her late fifties, repeated this adamantly to me after I and my Tibetan woman assistant asked her for a taped interview about local history (Tib. *lo rgyus*).[1] She would hear none of our explanations about my interest in people's personal histories and insisted that I seek out old men, they would know about "early, early, early times" (Tib. *sngan na sngan na sngan na*).

That awkward encounter occurred in the spring of 1995, during an early attempt at collecting residents' oral histories based on a brief interview schedule. At the time I thought I had understood Ama Drolma's (unspoken) message to me: as an uneducated lay village woman, she did not consider herself a legitimate narrator of 'history'. It was not until much later, when I tried to write about the life-stories I eventually heard from some sixty Tibetan men and women, who had lived through the socialist transformation, that I realized that Ama Drolma's narrative also revealed that the category of 'history', itself, was a crucial aspect of the gendered state violence that she and her peers had experienced under the CCP.

## SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

In this chapter I address the painful process of the incorporation of Labrang into the PRC nation-state by rethinking 'history' as fundamentally a gendered 'practice of time' (Mueggler 2001: 7; cf. Rofel 1994; Watson (ed.) 1994), one that unfolds as situated persons work to remember within a variety of hierarchically arranged discourse genres under the press of relations of power. From this perspective, we have to consider history-making as a situated politics of memory. That is, memories, in state and academic media as much as in ordinary conversations, are only made into stories through contemporary, context-specific selections, which foreground some things and repress others (White 1981: 10; Scott 1991; Marcus 1992; Watson 1994: 2; Hall 1998: 440; Kansteiner 2002). Indeed, Prasenjit Duara, in his analysis of historiography and early nationalism in China, characterized modern nationalism as a unique form of state-sponsored forgetting, a way of organizing the past that located new national communities in posited oppositions between 'tradition' and

[1] All names used in this article are pseudonyms. Due to the sensitive nature of this material, I do not give much identifying information about my interlocutors.

'modernity' (1995: 4). From this angle, minority nationality (Ch. *minzu*) citizenship during the post-Mao reforms was supposed to erase the assimilationist traumas of the Maoist years and re-emphasize the timeless categorical equality of the democratic multiethnic ideal and highlight national unity in the future-oriented quest for development and modernity.

Labrang is a particularly charged context for such considerations. Contrary to recent popular notions of Tibetan Buddhism as an eminently peaceful, individualist or ultra-rationalist set of philosophies,[2] Tibetans adopted specifically tantric forms of Buddhism from India which, in practice, amounted to highly masculinist, even martial institutions and forms of governance. As Toni Huber (1999) and others have pointed out, the successful spread of Tibetan Buddhism across Inner Asia (and even to the Qing court) hinged on the uniquely Tibetan subject of the *trulku* (Tib. *sprul sku*) (incarnate lama). As the incarnation of both a Buddha and a predecessor lama, trulkus were heirs to both political economic estates (Tib. *bla brang*) and the tantric Buddhist capacity to violently tame enemies of the Dharma and command legions of protector deities. Thus, through close, patrifilial alliances with lay male leaders, elaborate ritual pageants and everyday worship practices, the Geluk sect trulkus at Labrang, as elsewhere, sought to 'mandalize' the region. That is, they worked to construct the region as a Buddhist polity and patronage centre on the model of a transcendent tantric Buddhist mandala palace—even *after* the People's Liberation Army marched into the valley in 1949.

In such a context, I realized pretty quickly that my early naive attempts to interview Tibetan elders like Ama Drolma for oral history only served to highlight how much local Tibetans, as members of a minority nationality with strong links to a dissident community abroad, were precariously situated amidst ongoing conflicts over the nature of history itself in the Chinese nation. In Tibetan regions, the media of memory deployed by post-Mao Chinese state officials continued to insist on a Maoist historiography of the revolution there. Tibetan elders in Labrang thus struggled, on pain of arrest and interrogation, to account for their traumatic

[2] As Donald Lopez (1998, 2006) and others have pointed out, in recent years the Dalai Lama has been instrumental in promoting this modernist and universalizing vision of Tibetan Buddhism.

experiences of that rupture. In Labrang, the unspeakable was fraught with emotional and political danger.

## GENDER, PERSONHOOD AND NARRATIVE POLITICS

I only heard elder men's and women's accounts of their lives when I gave up interviewing and participated in private conversations on their terms. Here I make sense of this process by avoiding a dichotomy between 'subjective' memory and 'objective' history, and considering *all* accounts of the past as narratives that vigorously forget even as they remember. I draw on the work of theorists of language who consider narrative to be a fundamental speech genre, in which people work together to order relationships between selves and others in space and time by placing them in the unfolding plot of a story.[3] From this angle, narratives are speech genres, which offer particularly powerful possibilities for speakers to take stances or 'footings' vis-à-vis topics and other people in time and space, as well as vis-à-vis their own current and past selves (Goffman 1981: 147).

Here, I argue that attention to gender dynamics can elucidate important narrative processes, which shaped the Labrang locality even after the incorporation of the region into the PRC nation-state. I take gender to be a contested process of people recognizing bodies to be intrinsically linked to hierarchized personas and types of agency, discourse genres, and social contexts. As such, it is a particularly fundamental set of signs and practices with which people signal their own and recognize others' stances in narrative events. In fact, I argue that in the Tibetans' stories about the past that I heard, gender was both a crucial frame for contemporary subject positions and an *unavoidable index* of past traumatic ruptures in experiences of Tibetan personhood.

In this light 'history' in post-Mao Labrang was never just a fixed, but hidden story. Instead, it was a contemporary cultural politics of gendered selfhood and agency posited in competing narratives of the

[3] See Volosinov (1986) [1929]; Bakhtin (1981) [1937-38]; Ricoeur (1981); White (1981); Hanks (1989); Tedlock (1995); Ochs and Capps (1996). Linguistic anthropologists Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps argue that narrative is a fundamental speech genre because it is culturally universal and emerges early in childhood speech development. Provided only that they present sequences of events, Ochs and Capps assert that the term 'narrative' covers verbalized, visualized or performed versions (1996: 19).

past. Thus, in considering the roles of conflict or violence in contemporary Tibetan communities in the PRC, it is crucial to understand the historical legacy of the gendered violence that structured Maoist socialist transformation (1958–79) in Tibetan regions. This is because since economic reforms in the 1980s, memories of that collective trauma are shaping the moral parameters of contemporary social action among Tibetans in the PRC and abroad.

## SPEAKING BITTERNESS: THE GENDERED VIOLENCE OF STATIST REMEMBERING

Here I sketch out only the most stark of these processes by considering a few of the ways that some elders, in their private first person narratives to me, opposed the gendered premises of a still-powerful genre of Maoist historiography—'speaking or remembering bitterness' testimonials (Ch. *suku*, Tib. *sdug ngal bshad pa/dran pa*). As many have pointed out, these first-person testimonials of the rural masses' experiences of 'feudal exploitation' and then 'liberation' from 'class oppression' were the narrative backbone of the Chinese Communist revolution (Anagnost 1989, 1994, 1997; Rofel 1994; Jacka and Petkovic 1998; Hershatter 2001). By the time they were implemented widely in the Labrang region, these discourse practices were rote components of Maoist mass movements. Conventions for their performance hinged on the narrators' presentation of their brutally victimized bodies under past exploitation, thus supposedly eliciting audiences' empathetic tears and angry solidarity.

As they were implemented and performed in the Labrang region at compulsory group meetings beginning in 1958, speaking bitterness testimonials from local Tibetan men and women alike were the key events through which state cadres could finally and directly attack Labrang's Tibetan Buddhist monastic order, seeming to radically upend local kin-based gender hierarchies that were organized around what I call 'patrifiliality', the ideal respect for and loyalty to elder men and lamas. As such, speaking bitterness testimonials in Labrang were occasions for national secularization *via* gendered desecration. This was true not only because the narratives professed to lay bare feudal class relations masked by religion but, most saliently, because they mandated the public performance of a newly abstract notion of

gender (as a social construction of class relations). This statist gender, manifest in the display of a kind of socialist androgyny, supposedly represented a truly ‘modern’ PRC subject, one who was liberated from the obligations of local kin ties and thus empowered to publicly accuse Tibetan superiors of exploitation on behalf of the state.

As against the relative marginality of women and femininities among Tibetans under Labrang, speaking bitterness practices from 1958 on featured ‘liberated’ Tibetan women ‘serfs’, now refigured as *funu*, or modern women in the service not of households but of the state, as emblematic revolutionary agents (cf. Barlow 1994).[4] Early Tibetan women ‘activists’ (Ch. *jijifenzi*), nurtured in unprecedented ‘women’s training classes’ (Ch. *fuxunban*) under the auspices of the state’s Women’s Federation (Ch. *fulian*), eventually all sported the mandatory, gender-neutral pants and jacket of the ideal socialist subject, and (seemingly) participated in meetings on an equal footing with men (Zong Zidu 1956; Long Rangxiong 1959; Strong 1959; Dhondup Choedun 1978; Ama Adhe 1997).

Unlike in neighbouring Han communities, where significant numbers of women became active cadres in the early 1950s, among rural Tibetans in Labrang, Maoist women’s liberation was conspicuously embodied only later, in the extreme terms of speaking bitterness testimony, that is, in public struggle meetings (Ch. *pidou hui*, Tib. *’thab ’dzing*) during the Anti-Feudalism and Democratic Reform campaigns in the spring and summer of 1958. As Tibetan men’s guerrilla resistance to collectivization efforts in the Sino-Tibetan frontier zone spread from the mid-1950s on, in early 1958 the few newly ‘trained’ Tibetan men and women cadres were called upon to support PLA troops back in their home regions and to help justify the arrests of Tibetan lay leaders, monks and lamas (Dreyer 1976: 159; GGK 1987: 114).

At such mandatory meetings all Tibetans were required to publicly testify to their participation in the revolution. In the wake of the 1958

---

[4] The life-size clay sculpture exhibit in Lhasa, Wrath of the Serfs, was commissioned in the early 1970s as a travelling exhibit. It represented vignettes of brutal exploitation of Tibetan serfs by ‘the big three’, Tibetan aristocracy, government and monasteries, and was based on speaking bitterness narratives elicited from 100 ‘liberated serfs’ by a team of Chinese and Tibetan artists sent from Beijing. Importantly, Tibetan women are depicted in the exhibit as foregrounded revolutionary agents who go from victim to victor by the end of the cycle (Harris 1999: 130).

crackdown on Tibetan men's violent resistance, speaking bitterness narratives were supposed to provide the moral ground for the public humiliation of Tibetan laymen and lamas at the hands of Chinese and Tibetan activists. A glimpse of the content of such narratives can be found in a 1958 diatribe from Qinghai printed in the state-run magazine *Nationalities Unite*. In it, the author says he was a monk for ten years and that at that time monks were shameless: there was "not one who has not violated a woman, not one who has not violated the young monks. They are all like beasts" (Jurists 1960: 61; also see Strong 1959). By the fall of 1958, almost two-thirds of the 3,500 resident monks in the monastery were imprisoned or in labour camps. The rest returned to lay life, the monastery closed, worship was forbidden and rural regions were reorganized into communes.[5]

In that context, the unprecedented visibility of the few Tibetan and Han women who took centre stage to scream their bitterness at Tibetan incarnate lamas would have been particularly significant for locals.[6] Indeed, Tibetans' accounts of this process throughout the frontier zone suggest that in singling out Han and Tibetan women identified as activists or former serfs to publicly humiliate lamas, cadres sought to utilize the gender status of such women to desecrate Tibetan divine masculine authority and to assert instead the modern superiority of rational and ordinary biological sex difference (Jurists 1960: 26, 222; Dhondup Choedun 1977: 57; Ama Adhe 1997: 69). In speaking bitterness narratives, the figure of the Tibetan woman revolutionary agent was particularly suited for the ritualized

[5] These numbers were reported by Alags Tsa yus tshang in an interview with Warren Smith. The Alags, also known as Tenzin Palbar, is a well-known incarnate lama and former monk at Labrang who was arrested and imprisoned at this time. He states that there were 3,500 monks at the time. 2,000 were arrested, 800 of those, mainly elite monks and high lamas, were imprisoned and the other 1,200 monks were placed in 'reform through labor' (Ch. *laogai*) camps. According to him, only 200 of the original 2,000 survived hard labour, torture and imprisonment. He himself survived and fled to India in 1987 (Smith 1996: 482; cf. Tenzin Palbar 1994). Note that many younger lamas, at least those who had not openly defied state agents, were placed at this time in 'cadre training classes' at the Northwest Nationalities Institute in Lanzhou.

[6] See Ama Adhe (1997) and Palden Gyatso (1997) for similar accounts of the rapid move in Khams (spring 1956) and Tibet (summer 1959) from the meetings introducing Democratic Reforms to abusive uses of 'speaking bitterness' narratives in struggle sessions. The Panchen Lama, in his courageous 1962 petition criticizing errors made by local cadres in Tibetan regions in the 1950s, argues that one of the main 'mistakes' in the introduction of Democratic Reforms was the rapid move from a few perfunctory meetings to mass struggle sessions and arrests (1997: 12).

exposure of monks and lamas' 'illegitimate claims' to Tibetans' patrifilial loyalty, and for demonstrating the legitimate ascendance of state-empowered cadres in their stead—she embodied the culmination of national incorporation as emasculation.

## QUANDARIES OF AGENCY AND OPPOSITIONAL PRACTICES OF TIME

Of course, despite such traumatic and gendered rupture, the socialist transformation of Labrang was *not* a simple process of state cadres giving locals a self-conscious history where none existed. Tibetologists have noted the centuries-old avid interest of Tibetan scholars in a wide variety of historiographic genres, a preoccupation that distinguished them from their models in Indian Buddhist literary traditions (van der Kuijp 1996: 40; Gyatso 1996; Robinson 1996).[7] Further, as Janet Gyatso (1998: 109) argues, Tibetans across regions have long been particularly fascinated with forms of individual life-writing and life-storytelling, including biography (Tib. *rnam thar*) and autobiography (Tib. *rang rnam*), or accounts of exemplary individuals presenting a retrospective process of the development of an enlightened self. In fact, in the Labrang region, trulkus or incarnate lamas were the ideal Tibetan historical agents. They were the most legitimate and authoritative subjects of written and oral biography and autobiography.

Crucially, life stories of lamas' miraculous tantric powers and achievements were not presented as myth. Instead, they often lent the narrative force of eyewitness to strong claims to historical truth; their practical efficacy for local Tibetan readers or listeners depended on this historicity (Gyatso 1998: 9). Framed by lamas' status as enlightened beings, their life stories *in the telling* were one crucial means by which men and women narrators positioned themselves as faithful patrons and beneficiaries of their prowess and protection. Ama Luji, a Labrang village native in her mid-sixties, who told me she grew up eagerly listening to stories about the miraculous powers of Jamyang Shepa and other lamas, perhaps put it the most succinctly, "if [those stories] weren't told," she said, "people

[7] Leonard van der Kuijp notes that fragments exist of the earliest Tibetan historiographic works from the seventh to ninth centuries. These early texts reveal an intense interest in record-keeping, including royal and family genealogies and archives.

wouldn't have faith" (Tib. *bshad rgyu med na dad pa skyes rgyu ma red*).

Yet by the 1990s Tibetan men and women across generations widely assumed the (limited) validity of a social-scientific time-space posited in Marxist historiography. The almost exclusive focus among Tibetans on life-stories of enlightened trulkus and lamas had given ground to widespread acceptance of the idea that ordinary people's lives, including those of women, revealed important information about the nature of society, especially since local Tibetan 'custom' (Tib. *bca' srol las srol*) had become fetishized as a marker of ethnic pride.[8] In the Labrang region there were many educated Tibetans (mostly laymen) proudly researching the 'social history' (Ch. *shehui lishi*) of their minority *minzu* localities.

During my fieldwork, under ongoing restrictions against public discussion of the Maoist years, the narrative power of ordinary individuals' first person truth claims about the past had taken on new and urgent meaning for many Tibetans. But this did *not* entail my easy access to polarized views of Tibetan selves and Chinese others. The unspeakable among Tibetans was not just the product of state repression; it was also a marker of locals' struggles with the nature of their own and other Tibetans' agency in (and responsibility for) the unprecedented shape and scope of state violence beginning in 1958.

This was especially apparent in the elder men's and women's accounts that most directly opposed the premises of the state's 'speaking bitterness' genre of historiography. As these narrators recruited me to participate in the telling, I found myself awkwardly caught up in a bitter, oppositional *class politics* among Tibetans, conflicts that turned on the collaboration of older men and women in reestablishing an ideal Tibetan masculinity as the community's moral ground. This, I would argue, was the most profound of the hidden legacies of the Maoist years in Labrang, differentiating Tibetans in the 1990s in ways not accounted for in speaking bitterness depictions of class struggle. These were the elders who felt themselves and their households to have been grievously victimized in the process of Maoist class labelling, manifest in the speaking bitterness sessions.

[8] Harris (1999) documents this process visually, noting that before 1959 realist paintings and self-portraits of lamas, not to mention depictions of ordinary Tibetans' lives, were almost unheard of. In Amdo the 1980s saw an explosion of vernacular literature and video production depicting ordinary lives, including first person accounts.

Whether they were struggled as class enemies or as farmers and nomads, they later found themselves at the bottom of a practical chain of command which left them powerless to resist change.[9] In the 1990s, most were elder members of village households struggling to make ends meet.

As I myself began to partake of the categories structuring their life stories in our conversations, I shared in an ongoing process by which both Tibetan men and women appropriated the narrative forms and historiographic premises of the CCP's speaking bitterness genre to participate in a vigorous alternative historiography. That is, they constructed different arrangements of gendered selves, agencies and moralities, often doing this even if their accounts were not posed in conscious opposition to official histories. Thus, in striking contrast to the socialist nostalgia of older Han urban women interviewed by Lisa Rofel (1994), for example, most Labrang Tibetan women, like Ama Drolma, in their accounts of the Maoist years implicitly and explicitly *erased* state discourse of women's liberation in favour of presenting themselves, along with men, as invested in Tibetan patrifiliality. Thus, in 1995, when I in effect asked for her testimony about the past, Ama Drolma instead asserted the narrative authority of Tibetan patriarchs over her own, even though several of the men she listed as potential narrators were the same age as her (recall that she had protested that she was too young to know about early, early, early times). In that way, she rejected the Maoist historical account and reasserted the implicit naturalness of a local sex/gender hierarchy that many Tibetans felt had been radically upended in some of the worst of Maoist state violence.

[9] This group consisted of about twenty-five of a total sixty who told me stories of the past, fourteen men and eleven women, aged between fifty and seventy. Of those twenty-five, only three were cadres at the time (one woman, Ama Drolkar, mentioned above, studied in Lanzhou but did not become a cadre). During the Maoist years, ten were labelled class enemies, targeted for being monk, landlord, rich trader or rebel, and the rest were farmers.

## REFIGURING STATE AGENCY: APA GONGJIA

Tibetan men and women's conscious and unconscious collaboration in alternative historiography reinterpreted the public performance of socialist androgyny, beginning in 1958, as an imposed framework for ethnic assimilation under Han-dominated state expropriation. They thus highlighted ethnicity, in addition to gender, as a salient rupture in Tibetan personhood caused by the imposed shape of CCP rule in Labrang. Indeed, the accounts of their pasts I eventually heard from elder men and women across the community in a variety of ways overwhelmingly narrated the Maoist years as a story of the (gendered) Chinese state.[10]

Throughout these conversations, and in many other contexts, both men and women routinely cast the Chinese state as the protagonist in the persona of Apa Gongjia, or Father State—a unitary, radically alien and uncannily powerful paternal agent. In striking contrast to official historiography, elders associated the arrival of Apa Gongjia not with 1949, but with the overthrow of the monastery and the forced reorganization of their lives in 1958. Thus, in the context of oppositional accounts told in private spaces, the persona of Apa Gongjia refers, through safer forms of implication, to a scathing critique of Chinese state policies and officials. By anthropomorphizing the state in this gendered way, elders effectively brought the state out of the narrative shadows and placed it centre-stage. That is, they countered the erasure of state disciplinary agency common in speaking bitterness historiography and effectively foregrounded the unmarked politics of competing masculinities in Labrang's socialist transformation—in our conversations they refigured Democratic Reforms as a focused will to overthrow Labrang's mandalic order.

Ama Tsholo, along with her husband Apa Jikmay, the last remaining heir of a prominent line of local tribal leaders, expressed this notion of rupture in a phrase repeated throughout their co-constructed story, "1958, the year [we] had to be afraid" (Tib. *lnga*

[10] I have talked with hundreds of laypeople throughout the main villages surrounding the monastery, as well to monks and nuns in Labrang over the course of my fieldwork there. But I refer here only to those Tibetans born before 1949 (people in their mid-forties and above) who told detailed stories of their lives. Of those, there were twenty-six men (three monks and seven former monks, including one incarnate lama), and twenty-eight women (including three nuns). The majority, over thirty of them, were sixty years of age and older.

*brgyad lo skrag dgos dus*). Apa Gongjia's arrival as a fearsome colonizing agent is the narrative threshold to which all temporal terms of rupture in these stories referred –'before' (Tib. *sngan na, sngon chad*) or 'in the past' (Tib. *nyin dus*) versus 'now' (Tib. *da*) or 'nowadays' (Tib. *deng sang*).

The dignified Apa Denzin, seventy-seven years old and a former monk servant of a high status incarnate lama, always punctuated his stories of being targeted during the Maoist years with the stark temporal contrasts of before versus now. He would eventually tell me about being labelled a wealthy trader and brutally struggled as a class enemy in his village, but he framed our very first conversation by asserting that nothing changed until Apa Gongjia came (Tib. *Apa Gongjia thon dang*), and he insisted on explicitly teaching me this phrase for the Chinese Communist state as a marker of local Tibetan subjectivity: "we say Apa Gongjia".

In this way, Apa Gongjia was a particularly important protagonist in elders' oppositional testimony. As a subject of their sentences, he was most often the powerful, active agent of transitive verbs, emphasized in speech with a particle marking him as such (cf. Ahearn 2001; Agha 1993; Duranti 1994).[11] Akhu Jamyang, a seventy year old monk scholar in the monastery, told me how in 1958 Buddhist texts and images were destroyed. When I asked who did the destroying, he replied, "the Chinese" and his young lay male student clarified, "Apa Gongjia destroyed them" (Tib. *Apa Gongjia gis bshigs dang*).

The hybrid form of the phrase Apa Gongjia for the Chinese Communist State perfectly encapsulates local Tibetans' struggles to account for the new gendered premises for human agency introduced in the 1958 campaigns. Apa is the local Tibetan term of respectful address to lay male familiars of one's father's generation. By attaching this to the Chinese loanword for public property and hence

[11] Tibetan dialects belong to the minority of world languages known as ergative languages. In these languages, a grammatical marker usually distinguishes agents of transitive verbs from both subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs (Ahearn 2001: 22). In everyday speech Tibetans tend to elide ergative agents, leaving implication to fill in the gaps, but in interviews and conversations with me about the Maoist years, Apa Gongjia is consistently referred to as an ergative agent (cf. Duranti 1994).

the state (*gongjia*),[12] elders effectively condensed into one agent powerful, yet abstract and dispersed, disciplinary forces, anthropomorphizing and gendering them so as to recognize both their Chinese origins and their appropriation by Tibetans.

The communicative impact of the term Apa Gongjia derived in part from its particular historical resonance in the Sino-Tibetan frontier zone. For one thing, the disyllabic structure and homonymic pun of the Chinese loanword *gongjia* recalls the Tibetan epithet of *gongma* (lit. high one) for the distant yet powerful Qing emperors and their governments, a term that was still common in this region in the early 20th century (Ekvall 1939: 51). Thus, we could see elders' use of the similar-sounding name Gongjia for the CCP state as a recognition of its commensurate status in the legacy of powerful masculine authorities impinging on Labrang—as against CCP claims to be a modern 'democratic' nation-state, Tibetan accounts cast it as an ethnically other, non-local hierarchy of rule.[13]

Further, by relativizing the CCP state in the inappropriately intimate terms of a familiar father figure and head of a lay household,[14] elders both sarcastically highlighted CCP leaders' unspoken claims to absolute and unmarked authority, and recognized their radically secularizing attempts to usurp former patrifilial alliances between local household heads and the monastery. "Now," said Apa Denzin, "it is Father State's rules" (Tib. *da gongjia gi sgrig lam red*), using a word for rules (Tib. *sgrig lam*) that had been most widely used for monastic discipline. Contrary to claims made in speaking bitterness narratives that the ordinary masses were the primary subjects of the revolution and the owners of communal property, elders' use of the Chinese term Gongjia recognized the otherness and the primary agency of the Chinese state (and specifically the

[12] Note that the Tibetan gloss for *gongjia* in the Labrang region is *gzhung*, the term given to public meeting halls, and often used grammatically as a substitute for Apa Gongjia, that is as an agent of transitive verbs.

[13] June Dreyer (1976: 158) notes that when the party began to crack down on local media in minority areas in the aftermath of the anti-rightist campaign (1957) and the run up to the Great Leap Forward (1958), investigators were horrified to find non-Han translations of party and government materials in a variety of minority *minzu* languages that rendered the CCP in old imperial terms.

[14] Note that alternative uses of the name often added the word *tshang*, meaning 'house' or 'household' to the name—'Apa Gongjia tshang', or just 'Gongjia tshang'— which is a locally prevalent way of addressing a lay or monastic person by respectfully recognizing their headship of a lay household or monastic estate.

Communist party), as a will to confiscate private possessions. Thus, elder men and women's use of the name Apa Gongjia for the state (instead of Ch. *zuguo* or Tib. *mes rgyal*) indicated their refusal to be incorporated into the ideally stateless nation of the Chinese Fatherland—'the great multi-ethnic family of the nation' (Ch. *duo minzu guojia*). In other words, their common use of the term marked their denial of the fictive kinship of 'state fatherhood', subtly highlighting the fact that the Chinese term was a cover for brutal state violence and denying that it was a legitimate stand-in for local patrifilial alliances and obligations (Heng and Devan 1992).

## REFIGURING PERSONAL AGENCY: CADRES AND PATRIFILIAL ORDINARY FOLK

In the telling, the might of Apa Gongjia as an agent also emptied local Tibetans of agency, a narrative device that was appealing to both men and women. Thus, as against the gross embodiment of class victims described in speaking bitterness narratives, the vast majority of elders' dissenting accounts focused on and enumerated violations of their embodied selves under Father State. Most focused on the pervasive, physical victimization of the majority of Tibetan locals in the unprecedented famine that accompanied confiscations and collectivization in the early sixties. Ama Gazang, a sixty-eight year old village woman, insisted that then "everyone was hungry", a situation she explained by asserting it was "because Apa Gongjia confiscated all the produce" (Tib. *hanebo Apa Gongjia gis* moshui *byas dang*—note Chinese loanword for confiscate, *moshui*). And she repeated again and again that many, many people died. All of this, she insisted, and they also had to work incessantly in the fields.

But narrative recourse to Apa Gongjia, and an emphasis on how 'everyone' suffered, masked local Tibetans' own involvements in Maoist violence. Many of them had, in fact, played a part in the speaking bitterness campaigns as cadres. Ama Gazang's situation particularly illustrated this. She never admitted that her present anxieties about being old and isolated were fundamentally shaped by the moral predicament produced by her own husband's participation as a *las byed pa* or cadre in the Maoist regime, and by others' perceptions of his ongoing impunity. Thus, narrators of oppositional accounts, including Ama Gazang, tended to deal with such moral

dilemmas by placing themselves on the virtuous side of a deep, binary class division that countered the expedient class labels asserted in speaking bitterness stories.

These elders inverted the moral roles of accuser and accused and asserted a fundamentally hierarchical relationship between an exploiting class of *las byed pa* (state cadres) and exploited *wesang* (local ordinary folks, across farming and nomad regions and regardless of previous economic status).[15] The term *wesang* in both men and women's narratives, posited in opposition to *las byed pa*, identified an imagined alternative Tibetan lay public in Labrang, one that consisted in a patrifilial moral economy structured by women's ideal support for men's rightful translocal authority on behalf of households and vis-à-vis the monastery. In this alternative vision, class exploitation, just like abstract gender, is only a feature of the Chinese masculine authority of Apa Gongjia and the cadres (men or women) who chose to be masculinized in that new way. These rhetorical moves worked to solidify elders' collaboration in reproducing a vision of an ideal Tibetan gender complementarity grounding an oppositional and morally superior social world.

In contrast to state rhetoric about 'women's liberation' and the expedient emphasis on Tibetan women as state agents, both men and women narrators overwhelmingly focused on the fateful agency of Tibetan men during the Maoist years. Indeed, in their co-constructed narrative to me about CCP party members in their village, Ama Luji and her husband Apa Cheka both angrily focused only on Gyaplo, the past and present Tibetan township (or brigade) party secretary, even though the majority of village party members they listed were old women. Ama Luji bitterly insisted that Gyaplo was not like other 'real' elder men (Tib. *rgan po ngo ma*). "Real elder men", she said, "took up guns against the Chinese and fled to the hills." "And", Apa Cheka added, "most of them were killed by PLA troops". They said that Gyaplo, by contrast, had joined the People's Militia (Tib. *dmangs dmag*) in the early 1950s and had helped to guide Chinese troops to Tibetan guerrillas in the mountains around Labrang. From that time on, Ama Luji argued, his family went from poor to the most

[15] Note that *wesang* (spelled *besang*) is not the term that was used during the Maoist years to translate into Tibetan the concept of 'the masses' (Ch. *qunzhong* or *mi dmangs*). Instead, this is a local idiom that may well be an old transliteration of the pre-Communist Chinese term for the common folk, *bai xing*, or 'hundred names'.

powerful in their village. In many such stories, elders condemned the local Tibetan cadres at that time as exclusively venal agents, those who, unlike ideal Tibetan patriarchs participating in reciprocal obligations between households and the monastery, used the work of the state to enrich themselves. In this way, elders appropriated the terms of the Marxist socioeconomic analysis, first introduced in speaking bitterness narratives, and implied perhaps the most damning of their criticisms: that the impunity provided by the brute might of Apa Gongjia allowed certain Tibetan male cadres, as *illegitimate patriarchs,* to enrich their households, based on the violent expropriation of the ordinary folk initiated in 1958.

Many of these elders depicted Tibetan cadres in 1958, especially young toughs like Gyaplo and Ama Gazang's husband who joined the People's Militia, gleefully dividing amongst themselves confiscated clothing, money, and jewellery, avoiding manual labour and eating well during the famine by beating starving villagers and confiscating their produce for the commune. For them, these accounts resonated strongly with their perception that those who then served the state well continued to live well in the present, while they themselves struggled to afford butter.

Ama Gazang, bitterly angry at 'bad' Tibetan cadres, was also eager to consign this to the past and thereby avoid condemning her own husband. She insisted, when I asked, that all such people had died. But others insisted otherwise. Apa Denzin declared that there were still many of those Tibetan cadres around. "They are retired now," he said. Then, switching to a first person plural subject, he insisted, "outwardly we are nice to them, but inwardly no one likes them. We don't forget."

## CONCLUSION: THE VIOLENCE OF BUDDHIST HISTORICITY

Tibetans in Labrang in the mid-1990s were variously positioned vis-à-vis the revitalized monastic community and state institutions amidst the rapid flux of a market economy. Over time I came to realize how certain elders' dissenting narratives of the Maoist years were an important part of a much larger oppositional practice of time, in which Tibetans across the community were engaged. My approach to history here as an ongoing (and gendered) narrative politics of memory amidst the high stakes of national incorporation

in the PRC belies easy boundaries between religious and secular orders in situations of conflict. Such conceptual boundaries in PRC policy work to confine citizens' claims to alternative transcendent authorities to the benign and circumscribed spaces and activities of 'normal religion' (Ch. *zhengchang zongjiao*). Yet, as we have seen, under the legacy of socialist transformation in the Sino-Tibetan frontier zone, Buddhist narratives escape such confines to permeate the lives and rageful passions of Tibetans who remember.

As against the narrative premises of Maoist socialist androgyny, which posited men and women as equal subjects of the state, the shared gendered terms of Tibetan elders' oppositional testimony worked to circumscribe the efficacy of the Chinese state and posit an alternative, ideally patrifilial Tibetan community. Indeed, both men and women's dissenting accounts of their experiences of socialist transformation were limited, like Maoist speaking bitterness narratives, to social and thus radically secular spatiotemporal terms. In this, these stories were distinguished from, and subordinated to, often in the same conversation, other, more predominant, narrative genres in which space and time expanded to include other possibilities for efficacious power that overwhelmed state-sponsored socialist realism with its own encompassing morality.

In fact, the truth claims of elders' oppositional testimony about the Maoist years were fundamentally linked to the performance of theirs and others' faith (Tib. *dad pa*) in the opposing, gendered historicity of the Buddha Dharma, as manifest especially in the power of local incarnate lamas. As far as I know there are no stories among Tibetans about the supernatural (or better, supersocial) powers of Apa Gongjia. Elders were much more interested in registering their awed amazement (Tib. *ya mtshar*) about the objectively transcendent power of Tibetan lamas. Indeed, for many of my interlocutors, but especially monks and lamas, I found that their accounts of the Maoist years refused to describe their own experiences, focusing instead with painful indignation on the arrests and humiliations of lamas and monks as representatives of revered monastic communities. In those accounts, even those about their own lifetimes, women tended to defer to men and both men and women marked time not with calendrical years but with a central trulku's position as a particular incarnation in a lineage (*sku sngan ma*, the previous incarnation, or *sku 'di*, this incarnation). Thus, despite new forms of self-expression in first-person narratives of ordinary men's *and* women's social

lives, these elders still reverently maintained a gendered hierarchy of discourse genres by subordinating and orienting their own stories to those of paternal masculine authorities.

As enlightened beings grounded in the absolute time of the Buddha Dharma, and community leaders again centred in the monastery, trulkus animated and arbitrated the karmic historical world of moral justice (Tib. *rgyu 'bras*). For those who lived with the impunity of Apa Gongjia and Tibetan cadres and the violence of socialist transformation in Labrang, the inevitability of death was associated with the inevitability of karmic justice. Trulkus were not direct and conscious arbiters of this justice. But in their capacity as embodiments of the Dharma, they could see, and thus witness, the unerasable karmic fruits of any individual's good or bad deeds in the past, and provide guidance for future moral action before one died and moved inexorably to the next life. As Ama Luji explained, "when you go to worship Jamyang Shepa, you cannot tell lies because he knows your mind" (Tib. *sems la shes gi*). In a way, then, trulkus' very presence in the Tibetan community laid bare hidden histories of unspoken conscience.

But elders' ironic commentary about retired cadres who now quietly sought the karmic guidance of trulkus was not enough to assuage enduring community rage about Maoist state violence. I heard in several conversations passionate stories about the circumstances of the deaths of Maoist cadres. According to these stories, when the great trulku Gongtang was finally released from prison in 1979 and returned to Labrang, locals responsible for violence against the monastery, its monks and lamas, began to die horrible deaths, deaths which people described in gory detail as the slow torture of unexplained illnesses. This was interpreted by narrators, both young and old, as due to the wrath of Gongtang.

Such stories most vividly pitted the locally grounded, yet transcendent, masculine empowerment of Tibetan trulkus against the alien and arbitrary masculine authority of the Chinese state. In the face of the unrelenting might of Apa Gongjia, which had been most evident in the 1970s and 1980s, but was still a reality in the 1990s and 2000's, alternative historiography among Tibetans was thus an ongoing interpretive battle—with themselves as well as with the state. Despite increasing socioeconomic inequality and a widening generation gap among Tibetans, elders' private counter narratives of the past vigorously posited a radically different social and moral

world from that of Maoist historiography, a world in which the Chinese Communist revolution united honest and pious lay Tibetans as an exploited community of ordinary folks still morally grounded by heroic monks and laymen. Meanwhile, the transcendent witness of lamas both revealed and adjudicated the truly unspeakable—the unredressed state violence and illegitimate patrimonies of local cadres.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This chapter is a greatly abridged version of chapter 3 of my book, *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007.

I conducted research during three trips to Labrang over a four year period between 1992 and 1996, with a return trip in 2002. The research was sponsored by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, a Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship, a National Science Foundation pre-dissertation grant, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan and the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School fellowships. Research in 2002 was supported by a Reed College summer research grant. Paid Leave at Reed College was generously supported by the Levine Fund.

## REFERENCES

Agha, Asif 1993. *Structural Form and Utterance Context in Lhasa Tibetan: Grammar and Indexicality in a Non-Configurational Language*. New York: Peter Lang.

Ahearn, Laura 2001. Language and Agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 109–37.

Ama Adhe (with Joy Blakeslee) 1997. *Ama Adhe, the Voice that Remembers: the Heroic Story of a Woman's Fight to Free Tibet*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Anagnost, Ann 1989. *The Transformation of Gender in Modern China*, *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*. Amherst: Project on Gender and the Curriculum.

—— 1994. Who is speaking here? Discursive Boundaries and Representation in post-Mao China. *In* J. Hay (ed.) *Boundaries in China.* London: Reaktion Books.

—— 1997. *National Pastimes: Narrative, Representation and Power in Modern China.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail 1981. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics. *In* M. Holquist (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barlow, Tani 1994. Theorizing Women: Funu, Guojia, Jiating, *In* A. Zito (ed.) *Body, Subject and Power in China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dhondup Choedon 1978. *Life in the Red Flag People's Commune.* Dharamsala: Information Office of H.H. the Dalai Lama.

Dreyer, June 1976. *China's Forty Millions*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Duara, Prasenjit 1995. *Rescuing history from the nation: questioning narratives of modern China*. Chicago: University Press.

Duranti, Alessandro 1994. *From Grammar to Politics: Linguistic Anthropology in a Western Samoan Village.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ekvall, Robert 1939. *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

GGK. 1987. (Gannan Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang [Introduction to Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture]). Lanzhou: Gansu Minzu Chubanshe.

Goffman, Erving 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gyatso, Janet 1996. Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The gTer ma Literature. *In* J.I. Cabezon and R.R. Jackson (eds), *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. New York: Snow Lion.

—— 1998. *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd 1998. You Must Remember This: Autobiography as Social Critique. *The Journal of American History*, 9: 439–65.

Hanks, William 1989. Text and Textuality. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 18: 95–128.

Harris, Clare 1999. *In the Image of Tibet: Painters of Tibet post-1959*. London: Reaktion Books.

Heng, Geraldine and Janadas Devan 1992. State Fatherhood: the Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality and Race in Singapore. *In* A. Parker, M. Russo, D. Sommer and P. Yaeger (eds), *Nationalisms and Sexualities.* New York: Routledge.

Hershatter, Gail 2001. The Remembered Self: Gender and Early Socialism in the Life Stories of Rural Shaanxi Women. Conference paper prepared for 'Gender in Motion: Division. of Labor and cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China', October 5–7, Berkeley, California.

Huber, Toni. 1999. *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jacka, Tamara and Josko Petkovic 1998. Ethnography and Video: Researching Women in China's Floating Population. Intersections, September 1998. http://wwwsshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/back_issues/tampt1.html (accessed Jan. 20, 2002).

Jurists, International Commission of 1960. Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic 1960: a Report to the International Commission of Jurists. Geneva: International Commission of Jurists.

Kansteiner, Wulf 2002. Finding Meaning in Memory: a Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. *History and Theory*, 41(2): 179–97.

van der Kuijp, Leonard 1996. Tibetan Historiography. *In* J.I. Cabezon and R.R. Jackson (eds), *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. New York: Snow Lion.
Long Rangxiong 1959. Xizang Funu de Xinsheng. (New Life for Tibetan Women). *Zhongguo Funu* (China's Women), 19: 16–17.
Lopez, Donald 1998. *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
—— 2006. *The madman's middle way: reflections on reality of the Tibetan monk Gendun Chopel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Makley, Charlene 2007. *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
Marcus, Julie 1992. Racism, Terror and the Production of Australian Auto/biographies. *In* J. Okeley and H. Callaway (eds), *Anthropology and Autobiography*. New York: Routledge.
Mueggler, Erik 2001. *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps 1996. Narrating the Self. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25: 19–43.
Palden Gyatso 1997 *The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk*. Tsering Shakya (trans.) New York: Grove Press.
H.H. The Panchen Lama 1997 [1962]. *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the $10^{th}$ Panchen Lama.* London: Tibet Information Network.
Ricoeur, Paul 1981. Narrative Time. *In* W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) *On Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Robinson, James 1996. The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography and Myth. *In* J.I. Cabezon and R.R. Jackson (eds), *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. New York: Snow Lion.
Rofel, Lisa 1994. Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China. *American Ethnologist*, 21(4): 700–22.
Scott, Joan. 1991. Experience. *In* J. Butler and J. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political.* New York : Routledge.
Smith, Warren 1996. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. Boulder: Westview Press.
Strong, Anna 1959. *Tibetan Interviews.* Peking: New World Press.
Tedlock, Dennis 1995. Interpretation, Participation, and the Role of Narrative in Dialogical Anthropology. *In* B. Mannheim and D. Tedlock (eds), *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
Tenzin Palbar. 1994. *(Alags Tsa yus tshang) nga'i pha yul gyi ya nga ba'i lo rgyus* (The Tragic History of My Fatherland). Dharamsala: Narthang Publications.
Volosinov, V.N. 1986 [1929]. *Marxism and the philosophy of Language*, L. Matejka & I. Titunik (trans.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Watson, Ruby (ed.) 1994. *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*. Sante Fe: School of American Research.
White, Hayden 1981. The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. *In* W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) *On Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Zong Zidu 1956. Xizang Funu he Ertong de Xin Shenghuo (The New Life of Tibetan Women and Children). *Zhongguo Funu* (China's Women), 4: 6–8.

# RELIGION AND CONFLICT OVER LAND IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALTAI: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BUILDING A SHRINE AND CREATING A NATURE PARK?

AGNIESZKA HALEMBA

> Faith, politics, life—this is a unity because every human being is a unity. One man—how can he divide himself into politics and into religion? This is all one, this is all my land. What is politics? Politics is my life, my land. A man is born and he should be a person, not be torn into pieces.
> *Anatolii Yalgakov*, Nizhnaya Talda (Lenjol), Republic of Altai, June 2005

In recent years[1] the Karakol valley, situated in the central part of the Republic of Altai, has become known as the birthplace of one of the most controversial religious and political movements in the Republic, usually named after the valley: the Karakol *Ak jaŋ*[2] movement. One could say that the activities of the movement cluster around two poles: the political and religious. The political pole comprises issues related to state politics, legislation changes and their local implementation. The religious pole comprises questions of religious authority and experience. The quotation used as an epigraph for this article, which comes from one of the most politically active members of this movement, Anatolii Yalgakov, a herder from Nizhnaya Talda village, shows us, however, that for the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members religious and political issues are inseparable. They are based on the same principle, shared widely in the region, that the land is a defining factor in all kinds of sociality. What makes the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement interesting is the fact that the connection between religious faith and social protest is explicitly and willingly acknowledged and underlined by the movement's members.

---

[1] This article is based on fieldwork carried out between 2001 and 2005.

[2] The name *Ak jaŋ* is explained in detail below. The words in *italics* are Altaian, unless otherwise indicated.

The arguments constructed by Karakol *Ak jaŋ*'s members show an interplay of ideas concerning the two kinds of power that influence people's lives: the mystical and the state-generated. These arguments often concern an issue that is crucial for the Altaians at present: the land, its ownership, its use and its relations to humans. Hence, in order to understand the ways in which the movement operates one must take into consideration both the importance of land in Altaian religious life and the land-related reforms taking place in the contemporary Russian Federation.[3] I argue that a sense of the importance of land is shared by most of the Altaians, regardless of their economic status, religious sympathies or political position. The present intra-Altaian conflicts arising around Karakol *Ak jaŋ*'s activities are triggered by the actions of the Russian state, which, by contrast, does not share this perception. Divisions among local inhabitants can be traced to divergent economic and class interests, rather than to divergent views on the significance of land.

## RELIGION IN THE ALTAI

The Altai is a chain of mountains intersected by the state borders of China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Russia. The Republic of Altai is located in the Russian part of the Altai Mountains. The Altaians currently comprise approximately 30% of the Republic's inhabitants, with 60% being Russian and around 5% Kazakh. Russians live mostly in the northern part of Altai, expect for a group of Old Believers[4] living in the south-western part. This article concerns the attitudes of the Altaians, who, although they do not belong to any of the major world religions, were nevertheless influenced by some of them, most notably Christianity and Buddhism.

Christianity holds a firm place in the Republic of Altai among its Russian inhabitants. Missionary zeal directed towards the Altaians began with the organisation of the Orthodox Mission for Altai in 1828–30 (Potapov 1953: 199), which was famous for its innovative

[3] Non-institutionalised religious life in Altai is a complex phenomenon, which cannot be even briefly analysed within the scope of this article. Below I give only a basic description of its paradigms. Readers interested in more detail might want to consult my book on Altaian religious life (Halemba 2006), as well as the work of Andrei Vinogradov (2003).

[4] Old Believers are the group of Orthodox Christians, who did not accept the 17th century's Nikon reforms and had to flee to remote parts of the Russian empire.

approach to conversion. Missionary activity was re-established, with some success, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[5]

Buddhism has influenced this region for many centuries, although there is, as yet, no evidence of the previous existence of Buddhist monasteries or shrines on the territory of the Russian Altai. There is, however, considerable evidence confirming the presence of peripatetic lamas in the region, as well as the existence of Buddhist monasteries very close to its borders (Sabin 1980; Borodaev and Kontev 1999).

Notwithstanding these influences, the majority of contemporary Altaians identify themselves as neither Christian nor Buddhist. Even if some of them accept baptism or become interested in Buddhist ideas, they rarely abandon the Altaian non-institutionalised religious beliefs and practices. At the heart of these is the worship of the Altai, both as land and as a spiritual entity. The word *altai* in the Altaian language not only stands for the name of a geographical area, but can also be used as a substitute for such terms as 'yurt', 'house', 'village', 'district' or 'country' (Tyukhteneva 1995). Hence, Altai is one, but at the same time it is multiple. Every person has his or her own *altai*, being places that are important and sacred to him or her, but these places are simultaneously united in the image of the Altai as a whole, where power is an inherent quality of its mountain passes, rivers and snowy peaks.

The Altai is the source of two of the most important religious concepts: *Altaidyŋ eezi* (Master of Altai) and *Altai Kudai* (Altai-God). Through these notions the Altaians express the worship of the land in their ritual practices. The worship of the Altai and its power are recognised by the Altaians as the foundation of all kinds of social relations and the Altai is seen as a formative part of a person, so all the processes taking place on, in and with the land directly affect the people who live there (Halemba 2006).

[5] Christianity is strong in the region of Ulagan as well as in the areas close to the republican capital Gorno-Altaisk. Nowadays the Evangelical Christians are also gaining ground among the Altaians (Broz, forthcoming).

## LAND REFORM IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND REPUBLIC OF ALTAI

It is difficult to give a precise and up-to-date analysis of the legal situation relating to land ownership and land use in contemporary Russia. Regulations change frequently and require constant monitoring and updating. These frequent changes are a crucial feature of the local social environment and many people find themselves troubled by the frequency with which new laws and regulations change. Much more importantly, local people see themselves as caught in a net of ever-changing laws of varying levels, scope and durability (Donahoe and Halemba 2006).

To the extent that it can be properly and briefly described, the present situation (as of mid-2006) is as follows. With the passing of the new Land Codex (Russian: *Zemel'nyi Kodeks*) of the Russian Federation in October 2001, although subject to varied and changing conditions, the vast majority of the land in the Russian Federation can be legally transferred into private hands. Initially the citizens of the Russian Federation had until January 2006 to prepare documents confirming their ownership of the land they were actually using.[6] This was important, as during the 1990s most of the land that formerly belonged to co-operative farms was either divided among their members or used in a communal way—if members decided to continue their economic activities together. People who opted to leave the co-operative enterprise were free to do so and they received a parcel of land, a so-called *pai* (Russian).

At that time, however, most of the land in the Altai was not divided and used in a way that could be considered to indicate individual ownership or right of use according to bureaucratic stipulations. Rather, the division was done semi-formally as, for example, during a village gathering when it was decided that Ivan would cut his hay on the left bank of X river between the three birch trees and the small hill, while Vitalii would herd his animals in winter from the Y mountain pass to the source of the Z spring. Hence, for the first fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union large parts of the land were actually used individually, but this usage did not have official state confirmation.

---

[6] This time limit has apparently been prolonged to 2010.

With the introduction of the new Land Codex it has become clear that such informal division of land would not satisfy the requirements of the state and market-driven economy, where land is becoming a necessary and scarce resource. In particular, the Altaians from the Karakol valley have observed with mixed feelings the development of the tourist industry in the northern part of the Republic. There, in more or less legally formalised ways, most of the attractive land (most importantly that with easy access to natural water reservoirs) has been transferred into the hands of investors from outside the Republic. Whether this was done in accordance with the Russian laws should be judged separately in each particular case. Importantly though, the transfer of land could continue because the people who actually used it for agriculture and herding, either in communal or in private ways, did not have properly prepared documents confirming their ownership.

In order for such documents to be prepared the process of measuring the land in the actual location (Russian: *mezhevanie*) has to be conducted, because the local delineation of land parcel 'from the three birch trees to the little spring' is obviously not sufficient for state purposes. As James Scott (1998) has convincingly argued, the state's interest lies in unification of land measurements, but this procedure often encounters major problems. In the Altaian case, first of all it costs money. These costs have usually been laid upon the local population, which is a considerable obstacle for the majority of herders. Moreover, there are very few specialists actually conducting the measurements, so there is a fear that local people will not be able to prepare the documents in time, before the land goes on open auction to the highest bidder. This situation generates multiple conflicts and accusations of bribery against local administrators, who are often suspected of making unofficial deals with the outside investors, promising to protract the registration of particularly valuable land parcels so that they can be sold on auction after the official deadline passes.

The issue of the ownership and use of the land from former co-operative farms raises the most emotions among the local inhabitants, but is by no means the only kind of land involved in the current discussions. For the present case study, there is at least one other important type of land involved. This is so-called *zemli lesnogo fonda* (Russian: forest fund land). This land constitutes 70% of all land in the Russian Federation. In Altai most forests, all mountains

and most of the land not in the immediate vicinity of the villages (apart from some summer pastures) belongs to this fund. Parts of it have always been used for herding. So far, the free sale of this land has been forbidden under Russian laws, including the new Land Codex, and this land has been managed on the federal level. Currently, however, the Russian Parliament is discussing the so-called Forest Codex, which would allow the outright sale of forest land to the highest bidder, or the opportunity to lease forest lands for ninety-nine years (Donahoe and Halemba 2006).

This is important for the Altaians for at least two reasons. Firstly, parts of this land were always used for herding and people are not sure what would happen if a particular piece of land was transferred into private hands. Would they still be able to use it? Secondly, but equally importantly, the Altaians are not only interested in the land as the basis for production and economic security. The worship of land forms a basis of their religious life and religiously important sites, such as high peaks, mountain passes and sacred healing springs, are located within the forest fund. Can the sacred places be sold? This question is especially difficult in the Altai as, although there are places that are widely worshipped, it is practically impossible to make a complete list of the sacred places of Altai that could, with the good-will of the Russian and local administration and, perhaps, NGO pressure, eventually be excluded from sale. Firstly, each Altaian clan and even family has its own sacred places. Secondly, *all* Altai is considered as *bailu* (lit. with injunctions), that is, a place where special, respectful rules of behaviour have to be observed. The claim that the sacred Altai should not be divided into parts has been one of the most important arguments used by the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement against the organisation of nature protection in the Karakol valley.

These issues, concerning both religion and the land, are intertwined in the activities of the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement. Below, after a more detailed introduction to the movement itself, I analyse two cases of conflict that have arisen out of the movement's activities.

## THE MOVEMENT OF THE OVERLOOKED

In 1997 Sergei Kynyev, an Altaian businessman, returned to the Altai after a few years of absence. Since then, although he continues his business activities, he has become known in the Republic not primarily as a businessman but as an initiator of the religious movement, *Ak jaŋ.* The kernel of the movement has been in the Ongudai (Oŋdoi) district of the Republic, where Karakol valley is located. From the outset Kynyev has organised meetings of Altaian spiritual practitioners (*biler kizhi* lit. knowledgeable person), whom he encouraged to exchange ideas concerning ritual practices and beliefs, with the aim of establishing a common core of Altaian beliefs for the future.

Why was the movement named *Ak jaŋ*? *Ak* in Altaian denotes the colour white, and it also stands for purity and sacredness. *Jaŋ* is nowadays translated by the Altaians themselves into Russian, most often as religion (*religia*), but it has a wider scope of use. According to Baskakov (1947) *jaŋ* in Altaian can mean (1) authority; (2) faith; (3) custom, law, principle; (4) canon, ensemble of rules. In a colloquial, but probably more comprehensive, usage *jaŋ* can be understood as a general 'way of doing things'. It is possible to say, while referring to a particular person, that this is her *jaŋ*, her way of doing things. It is also possible to use the expression *Soviet jaŋ,* meaning Soviet rule and authority, as well as *Krestü jaŋ*, meaning the Christian religion.

In the history of Altaian religious life this has been by no means the first time that the name *Ak jaŋ* has appeared. Most importantly, it is one of the names given to the early twentieth century movement known most widely in the English language literature as Burkhanism (Kolarz 1954; Collins 1993; Znamenski 1999). The ritual aspects of Burkhanism are often described as:

> A mixture of shamanic and lamaic rites, and also the traditional beliefs of the Altai people (worship of spring waters, spirits of places, the Master of Altai and so on), with the predominance of the last in a new, lamaised form. (Sagalaev 1984: 99)

However, other researchers (such as Andrei Vinogradov 2003) claim that Altaian beliefs and rituals, including those present in the Burkhanist movement, should not be seen as the result of Buddhist influences, but traced back to pre-Buddhist Turkic religious traditions.

Burkhanism has undoubtedly been an inspiration for Kynyev, who, especially at the beginning, saw himself as laying the ground for the national unification of the Altaians around one religious system. This has been very much in line with the goals and aspirations of the Burkhanist movement from the beginning of the twentieth century. Andrei Znamenski (1999) is right to stress that the leaders of the Burkhanist movement saw it as a new ideology for the Altaians. On an explicit level it was a movement against Russian influence and at the same time its aim was to reshape the internal features of Altaian religious life. As Znamenski writes:

> Burkhanism represents an example of such a cultural construction that emphasised the cultural unity of the nomads and capitalised on such symbols as the Altai as a synonym for a native land and Oirot Khan as a symbol of a common origin. (1999: 237).

Kynyev has attempted to follow this pattern.

At the beginning the people who are now at the core of the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement formed the closest circle among Kynyev's supporters. After a few years, however, the original movement broke up into branches, whose members have started to fling accusations at one another. These have ranged from charges of ritual incompetence, through rejection by spirits to accusations of arrogance, inflated egos and a craving for power. The Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement has emerged during this period (c.2000–02) as one of the most active branches, but at the same time as the one that most strongly contested and opposed Kynyev's activities.

The movement is currently[7] centred on Vasilii Chekurashev, a healer from Kulada village. The movement's members are mostly herders and workers living in small settlements in Karakol valley. The exceptions are a few educated women (mainly teachers), most of whom are involved in writing down poems and messages in highly spiritually loaded language. They are called *informatory* (Russian: informants), as they receive messages from the spirits (of various kinds), sometimes while speaking during a mild trance, but most often through so-called automatic writing, when informants are induced by spirits to write their messages down instead of speaking them out. Apart from informants, some people are simply 'members' and some have clearly defined functions (secretary, driver, technical support, preparing leaflets for distribution). According to the

[7] The state of affairs in 2005-06.

estimates of the movement's leader, there are around fivty to sixty active members scattered throughout eight villages.

Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members are often called by their fellow villagers *sektanty* (Russian: belonging to a sect), which partly refers to the fact that for the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* people networks of mutual support based on kin relations and neighbourhood tend to be replaced by networks of fellow believers. The first person the *Ak jaŋ* member would ask for a lift, for help with mending a fence or with another household task would probably be a fellow *Ak jaŋ* member and this fact is noticed and commented upon by the movement's members themselves, as well as by other villagers. Karakol *Ak jaŋ* people are seen as the ones who have come to form a new, separate and well-functioning network of mutual support, which is a change from the ways in which things in the village are 'usually done'.

The following quotation from a Karakol *Ak jaŋ* leaflet shows how its supporters view their own position within the Republican religious and political scene vis-à-vis Kynyev's group[8] and vis-à-vis Buddhism:

> *Ak jaŋ* (a white faith)—this is the faith of our ancestors. In our republic there are two groups of believers. The first one is led by Sergei Kynyev, who adopted a name Akai, which literally translates as 'white ruler'.[9] The second one is a group of people from the Karakol valley.
>
> Buddhism and the *Ak Burkhan* movement[10] have been created by our authorities (Russian: *praviteli*). They say that Buddhism is an ancient religion of the Altaians. The authorities gather young people and they send them to Buriatia to monasteries for education. How come that a source of our religion is in Buriatia? Who is from there: our ancestors or our authorities? (…)
>
> Akai's group gathers intellectuals, people with special education and also some fortune-tellers and healers. Akai himself is not a healer,

---

[8] In this leaflet they mention only two groups of *Ak jaŋ* believers. There are a few more groups using *Ak jaŋ* as their name, constantly undergoing processes of fusion and fission, but Kynyev is the most visible among the *Ak jaŋ* leaders.

[9] There is an ongoing controversy over a name that was adopted by Kynyev. Kynyev claims that the Altai did not accept him with his Russian name, Sergei, and he was given another name—Akai. According to him this means a 'white moon' (ak – ai), but his opponents claim that it means a 'white older brother', in other words 'a white leader' (ak aka[i]), and take it as the prime proof of Kynyev's arrogance and drive for power.

[10] The main Buddhist organisation in the Republic of Altai (see below).

> neither is he a prophet—he is just an ordinary person with a higher philological education. (…)
>
> The other *Ak jaŋ* movement, the Karakol one, gathers simple village people: men, women and youngsters from various villages from Ongudai and other districts. Why have these villages formed one group? Because they organise prayers, which are conducted communally in different settlements in one day under the leadership of a healer V.G. Chekurashev.
>
> What is the difference between these two groups? Kynyev's group is supported by the government and by *Tös Törgö*[11] (of which he is himself a part). Kynyev travels around the Republic, makes one-off gratis rituals and the Altaian newspaper Altaidyŋ *Cholmony* writes about his deeds free of charge.
>
> The Karakol group people are constantly dragged by internal state agencies to 'be sorted out', they are attacked by court cases by *Tös törgö* and accused of extremism, because they try to defend their constitutional rights in their own district. And they propagate their ideas by publishing leaflets for which they have to pay themselves, because no newspapers want to publish them.[12]

It can be said that Karakol *Ak jaŋ* has been formed by people who see themselves as disadvantaged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Clearly, the bulk of their activities being directed towards gaining some influence over the course of socio-economic change in the Altai. They produce a large number of leaflets and letters of complaint, they organise protests and attack local leaders with accusations of bribery, incompetence or evil intentions. At the same time, however, this is a religious movement and even the most politically active members devote much time to the conduct of religious rituals on the mountain passes. They are also involved in the distribution of religious leaflets. As Anatolii Yalgakov said, quoted at the beginning of this article, this is because politics and religion form a unity.

One of the many protest letters of the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* is dated June 2005 and addressed to the head of the Parliament of the Republic of Altai, Igor Yaimov. In this letter, they protest against:

1. The establishment of a nature protection territory *Üch Eŋmek* in Karakol valley.

---

[11] *Tös törgö* is a kind of Altaian self-government. Despite its limited (or almost non-existent) legal rights, its activities raise many controversial questions.

[12] This is a part of longer leaflet entitled 'Spiritual life in the Altai!' (*Dukhovnaya zhizn- na Altae!*), written in late 2003.

2. Buddhist missionary activities in the Republic of Altai, described in the letter as the 'forced introduction of Buddhism'.
3. The filing of accusations and court cases against Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement, in which its followers are described as religious extremists, hooligans or even terrorists.
4. The establishment of *Tös törgö* (self-government) of Altaian clans and revival of *jaisaŋ*—clan leaders.
5. The movement of Sergei Kynyev who, according to the authors of the letter, conducts rituals in the villages without asking for consent from local inhabitants and then after these rituals "simple people become ill, people start drinking, young people die".

In what follows, I consider the first two points of this letter.

## *AK JAŊ* AND BUDDHISM

As has already been noted, although there is no evidence of the existence of Buddhist monasteries and shrines within the territory of the contemporary Republic of Altai, there is no doubt that Altai, bordering Mongolia and Tuva, was influenced by Buddhist ideas and practices. There is strong evidence that Altai was an area of operation of peripatetic lamas. There were also people from Altai who received training in monasteries in Mongolia, or perhaps even in Tibet.

Today, however, Buddhism is actively propagated in the Republic of Altai and also by the Altaians themselves. The main Buddhist organisation in Altai is called *Ak Burkan*. I had an opportunity to follow its evolution from a movement that supported the revival of Burkhanism to one that claimed that Altaians *are* actually Buddhists, although they do not necessarily recognise this fact themselves. *Ak Burkan* invited the representative of the Dalai Lama for the Russian Federation to the Altai and initiated the erection of Buddhist stūpas (religious monuments) on the territory of the Republic of Altai. In 2003 the Altaian Buddhists received permission to build a shrine in the capital, for which they are now raising funds. It is against these activities that Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members protest.

How was it that Buddhism came to be propagated in the Altai and supported by some members of the Altaian political and intellectual elite? I just enumerate a few of the possible reasons, without any claim to the exclusivity of such a list.

First are the political advantages of Buddhism: Buddhism links the Altaians to the world of other Buddhist nations, especially neighbouring Mongolia and Tuva. Some activists hope that this could potentially broaden the opportunities for support from abroad.

Secondly, Buddhism is seen as an institutionalised religion, suitable for providing a unifying idea for the Altaian nation. It is usually presented by its supporters in contrast to local religious traditions of land worship or to activities of shamans and other religious specialists, which are seen as too diverse and uncontrollable to become the religion of a nation-state (Hamayon 1994). Here, Buddhism is seen as suitable for state-like formation and as having the potential for reinforcing national unification processes.

Thirdly, it is also the case that some Altaian intellectuals are attracted by the philosophical potential of Buddhism. They say that Altaian religion lacks this kind of philosophical layer, which could serve as a basis for personal growth. They look for a source of spiritual authority and trust upon which they could build their own ideas.

For the current argument the most important is the second reason: that Buddhism, as perceived in Altai, is a religion with a firm authority, written texts, hierarchical structures and clear cut dogmas, a religion with the potential to become a national one. At the same time, the Altaian supporters of Buddhism notice and appreciate that all over Inner Asia Buddhism has incorporated local nature cults, that lamas seem to promote respect for nature and that they conduct rituals on mountain passes, so-called *oboo* rituals (Tatar 1976; Sneath 1990; Abaeva 1992; Humphrey 1996). This, according to them, would fit very well with Altaian sensitivities. From such a perspective, Buddhism provides a fine combination of institutionalised religious forms, philosophical and political potential and sensitivity towards nature cults. Thus it seems perfect for the Altaian nation—or does it?

Karakol *Ak jaŋ* followers have arguments against the adoption of Buddhism. Below is a fragment of a message from the spirits received through automatic writing by one of the movement's informants (translation from Russian):

> Who needs a Buddhist shrine
> On the Altaian land?
> Altaians do not need it
> And Russians do not need it.

Buddhists need it
In order to capture Altai.
Buddhists-Burkhanists—
They have nothing,
No pride, no honesty
For their motherland.
They will not sacrifice their bones,
They will not die for the truth.
Buddhists-Burkhanists—
Their ambitions
They will make into religion.
(…)
And Buddha will be pleased
And Buddha will applaud
That stupid Altaians
Opened for him
The door to Altai
That they gave him
The keys to paradise,
To where he has wanted to come
For such a long time.
But he was rejected
By faithful sons of Altai
And only now
Here they are,
The spiritually weak,
The intellectually stupid,
Ready,
Because of their ambitions,
To do just anything.[13]

Here, Buddhists are presented as over-ambitious political activists, who are ready to sacrifice the sacredness of Altai in exchange for the privileges that the introduction of Buddhism would bring them. It is significant that the message was received originally in the Russian language. The 'informants' receive messages either in Altaian or in Russian. While most of the Altaian language messages concern the beauty of Altai and details of religious rituals, the messages in Russian concern political claims and accusations. Moreover, as in the message quoted above, the Russians are referred to as allies of the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* people, who feel that their powerlessness is an

[13] Message written down by Aleftina Tokoekova on 5th March 2004. It was later distributed in the form of a leaflet.

outcome of the evil intentions and barriers they encounter on the local, Altaian level of politics. For this reason, they also protest in the letter mentioned above against the so-called *Tös törgö,* which is meant to be the Altaian self-government. Karakol *Ak jaŋ* people claim that *Tös törgö* misrepresents Altaian interests by silencing the voice of 'simple people' (Russian: *prostye liudi*), which then cannot be heard by the federal (here equated with Russian) authorities. Buddhism, as well as Sergei Kynyev's *Ak jaŋ* movement, is seen as part of the elitist Altaian structures.

In the late 1990s the supporters of Buddhism erected the first Buddhist stūpa on the territory of the Altai Republic. They did this in the Karakol valley, next to Boochy village, because of some Altaian legends which recount that in the late eighteenth century an Altaian man called Boor had been trained in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. He returned to settle in the Karakol valley, where he eventually died and was buried. I do not know exactly how the consultations with local people were conducted before the erection of the stūpa. The *Ak Burkan* Buddhist leaders say that they asked for permission from the local people to build the stūpa and were granted it. Karakol *Ak jaŋ* people claim that the Buddhists were not granted permission, but went ahead with their plans anyway.

Ultimately, the stūpa was erected, but it remained in the valley for only a few years. It was destroyed, literally hammered down one night in autumn 2002. By whom? The Buddhists immediately accused the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement and filed a formal accusation against them. The case was rejected by a local prosecutor before the case actually got to court because of a lack of evidence. The responsibility of the *Ak jaŋ* people for destroying the stūpa has never been proven and they themselves reject the accusation. They say that it must have just been some youngsters from nearby villages. But why would such young people want to destroy the stūpa in the first place?

On the one hand, Buddhism has come to be seen by some Altaians as a religion of the elite, who wish to spread it among their fellow people. However, to date its proponents have failed to convince the majority of the Altaians that Buddhism stems from local religious traditions and that it can easily incorporate their existing religious practices. It is, therefore, perceived as something imposed on the village people, and supported by authorities, and those privileged in

terms of education and access to such resources as media coverage, funds and international travel.

On the other hand, the arguments against Buddhism are sometimes phrased in terms of deep structural differences between Buddhism and local religious traditions. For example, in another region of the Republic of Altai, the district of Kosh Agach, visiting Buddhist lamas were rejected on the basis of religious differences, in particular their approach towards land. My own suggestion is that the rejection of the Buddhists can be analysed in terms of their attempts to tame or subjugate the land.

In the ancient Tibetan chronicles one can find many examples of what has become to be known as practices of 'taming the land' (Sørensen 1994; Gyalbo et al. 2000; Wangdu and Diemberger 2000). In the most general terms, Tibetan texts describe the situation as follows: local deities occupied the land before the Buddhist expansion; the land was encountered by the Buddhists not as fixed or given, but as an agent with great potential for change and movement. The mountains and spirits were often inseparable and were seen as sources of movement, flexibility and change. Let us take the well-known example of Kailash, whose divinity is said to have come to Tibet from a 'far away place' but threatened to abandon Tibet if it fell into a state of immorality and degeneration. The Buddhists prevented it from doing so by placing four prayer banners at the foot of the mountain and connecting them by an iron chain (Buffetrille 1996). I suggest that some Buddhist activities in contemporary Altai can be analysed as similar attempts to subjugate the land.

There is a recurring motive in the stories about recent visits of lamas to the Kosh Agach district in the Altai. In such stories, the lama stands in the valley between the mountains or in the middle of the steppe and tells people that they have a powerful land inhabited by powerful spirits. He points at the mountain and says that there is the *eezi* (master spirit) there, a young man, and that at the sacred spring over there the *eezi* is a young lady. He also reveals to people what he calls the 'real names' of the places, using names which have never been heard before. His listeners are surprised and full of admiration for his knowledge—they have never heard such detailed accounts from their knowledgeable people (*biler ulus*). Still, their awe is mixed with disbelief. How it is possible to know the spirits so precisely and to give such detailed descriptions of them? The flexible worlds of the spirits suggested by the shamans and other

knowledgeable people are now being presented as structured and accessible. This lama knows so much and claims to know it for certain! Through the practice of naming spirits and fixing their images in this way, the lamas are seen to be preparing the way for the practice which, in the accounts of Buddhist expansion in Tibet, has become known as the processes of land subjugation. They recreate the spirits *as deities*, thereby establishing them as partners for the future dialogue between different religious traditions. On coming to the Altai, the Buddhist protagonists are not just entering into dialogue with the pre-existing systems of beliefs, but actively creating such systems in order to be able to interact with them.

I suggest that erecting a stūpa in the Karakol valley can be seen as part of these processes of land subjugation, which are rejected by some of the local people and explicitly opposed by the Karakol *Ak jaŋ*. The Altaians often emphasise that in their religious traditions they do not have any sort of permanent temple-like structures. They do erect stone altars on mountain passes for conducting so-called *Altai tagylga*—rituals of land worship, to some extent related to *oboo* rituals in other parts of Inner Asia.[14] However, these altars are basically piles of stones, not carefully maintained and far less structured than the obviously man-made Buddhist stūpas. The stūpa, a solid, permanent and visually sophisticated object in the middle of a beautiful valley is perceived as a cut through the land, establishing a clear, abiding point in its impermanence. It introduces a visually alien element, especially as it is built outside any settlement.

I was reminded about the reaction to the stūpa a few years later, during the celebrations of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the second world war. Then, in some villages in a Karakol valley it was decided to erect new monuments to the war heroes. In Boochy the administration decided to erect the monument outside the village on a mountain slope, so that people could also use the site as a place of quiet reflection and relaxation. However, many people said that this was a bad decision, as monuments are the concern of people, dead or alive, and they should be located in the village. Outside the village they introduce unnecessary disturbance—they will probably immediately become gathering points for evil spirits, who would just wait there for people instead of roaming the mountains trying to catch their victims at one of the numerous dangerous places.

[14] For detailed analysis of place of *Altai tagylga* in relation to *oboo* and *taiylga* rituals in Inner Asia see Halemba (2006: ch 8).

It is important to mention this attitude to monuments, as the urban elite presented the stūpa to local people as a monument to Boor, the Altaian who had previously brought Buddhism into the valley. On the one hand, such a presentation constituted a way to counter the displeasure of those who said that in local religious tradition there is no place for building permanent prayer sites or shrines; it was also a way of tapping into Soviet sensitivities, which regarded erecting monuments as very much a part of socio-political life. On the other hand however, this emphasis on the monument-like aspects of the stūpa, led to even more challenges. The problem of religious sensitivity went hand in hand with a perception of Buddhism as a beloved child of the educated town-based Altaian elite. Now, the stūpa has become not only a solid man-made object cutting through the flexibility of the land, but also a sign of political struggle, a clear indication that the powerful wanted to provide 'their folk' with a new ideology.

## CREATING A NATURE PARK

As mentioned, Sergei Kynyev returned to Altai after a few years of absence to establish a religious organisation, one which now occupies a significant position on the Republican political scene. Another returnee, Danil Mamyev set himself another task—he wanted to establish a nature park in the Karakol valley and in 2001 he succeeded. Although praised by international NGOs for excellent work and commitment to environmental preservation and protection of local cultural heritage, he did not manage to escape conflict in the very valley of Karakol.[15] His main opponents were the members of Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement.

Danil Mamyev was educated as a geologist and spent some ten years working on contracts, mainly in Central Asia. He returned to the Altai in the late 1990s and established a movement called The School of Ecology of the Soul Tengri (Russian: *Shkola Ekologii*

[15] See for example
http://www.sacredearthnetwork.org/updates/newsletters/2003/spring_p2.cfm accessed 6th July 2006);
http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/projects/grants.htm (accessed 6th July 2006);
https://www.earthisland.org/project/genPage2.cfm?generalID=205&pageID=98&subSiteID=7 (accessed 6th July 2006)

*Dushi Tengri*), presented as ecological in its aims and ambitions, but grounded in Altaian religious traditions. The movement includes several protagonists, who are engaged in various activities: from promoting healthy lifestyles, through alternative healing to environmental education. Danil Mamyev is engaged in making a philosophical and practical link between Altaian religious notions and contemporary environmental attitudes and projects (Mamyev 2003). The case of creating a nature park *Üch Eŋmek* has been the highlight of his activities so far.

The final trigger, which encouraged Danil Mamyev to make strenuous efforts to convince republican and local authorities that the park was necessary, was the passing of the new Land Code of the Russian Federation and the processes of land privatisation in Russia. Establishing a so-called 'nature park' (Russian: *prirodnyi park*), means that land in the park remains the property of its owners (whether federal, local administration or private), while there is an ecological regime governing its use, limiting and/or prohibiting activities considered to be dangerous for the environment. In fact, Danil Mamyev ideally wanted to establish a so-called *etno-prirodnyi park* (ethno-nature park) and he uses this name in internal documents and correspondence. However, this category of nature protection is present only in Republican laws and not in federal laws, so there was a fear that the existence of the park could be threatened by one federal decree.[16] He wanted the 'ethno' as a part of park's name, as he claims that his long-term goal is to show and to prove that the traditional[17] way of life of the Altaians is ecological *per se*.

The exact content of the ecological regime that should be implemented by the park has not so far been clarified, nor the means of its enforcement. Legal clarification of the park's rights and obligations is a goal of Mamyev and his supporters for the coming years. At present, however, what is important is that the land within

[16] That such fears were justified was proved in December 2004 when a federal decree, which declared that in future all nature protection territories would be managed on federal level, caused Republican authorities to close all nature parks out of fear that the land would be lost to the Republic. The parks were re-established a few months later, after pressure from the parks' leaders and non-governmental organisations.

[17] 'Traditional' in Mamyev's discourse stands for the 'real' and 'unspoiled' Altaian way of doing things (personal communication). He claims that the fact that nowadays one finds poachers and people over-cutting the trees among the Altaians is a sign of their having abandoned the ways of their forefathers.

the park cannot be freely sold. Hence, when the other parts of Altai go on open auction, Karakol valley, with its ancient tombs, healing springs and the sacred mountain of *Üch Eŋmek*, will not be sold to outside bidders unless some decree takes away the protected status of this territory.

At the same time, *Üch Eŋmek* park was planned as a way of managing tourist development. Observing the growth of the tourist industry in the northern parts of the Altai, people in Karakol valley were in agreement that so-called *dikii turizm* (lit. in Russian: wild tourism), when there is virtually no control over who comes, when, for how long and for what purpose, is not in their best interests. Tourism management was considered by the park's organisers to be a part of its environmental regime.

Importantly, Danil Mamyev is no longer a director of the park. Instead he is the person in the local district administration (Ongudai) responsible for measuring the land. He says that he left the park management (at his own request) for two reasons. First, he was so closely associated personally with the park by its opponents that he assumed that their attitude towards the park might improve when he left. Secondly, he wanted to make sure that processes of land measurement, which are crucial for all the interested parties, are conducted fairly and smoothly.[18]

So far, all looks reasonable enough—as it also looked in the case of Buddhism. A nature park does seem to be the best way of ensuring that the land is not sold to outsiders, that local people have a say in how the land is managed, and that development of tourism is kept under control. However, Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members are again in strong opposition to the existence of the park. The withdrawal of Danil Mamyev from the park to the local administration did not help either—on the contrary, he is now the main person accused of hampering the processes of land measurement.

On the part of Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members, the political arguments against the nature park very much resemble those used against Buddhism and also against Sergei Kynyev. The park is seen as a matter of the administration, who took the land away from the local people without asking them for permission.[19] They are on the way to

---

[18] The way in which the documents are formulated is crucial for the park's environmental regime and hence for its future operation.

[19] This accusation is a complex one, which cannot be simply ruled as either true or false. There were meetings in all the villages before the creation of the nature

presenting a kind of conspiracy theory, in which the local elite is against 'simple people'. Interestingly, as in the case of their opposition to Buddhism, the Russian state and the Russians are seen as potential allies. One of the movement's members complained about the ways in which his complaint letters were handled. He accused the republican postal service of being connected to the local power holders and not delivering his letters to the proper addresses. In summer 2005 Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members thought about organising a trip to Moscow with the aim of trying to get an audience with Vladimir Putin. As many people in Russia nowadays, they think that the president is an understanding and well-meaning father of the nation, constantly cheated and misinformed by ill-meaning local administrators.

Interestingly, longer conversations with some, especially the most politically active of the movement's members, revealed that in principle they have nothing against the nature park nor the development of tourism. As Anatolii Yalgakov said: "A nature park is a good idea. It is just that the people who sit there are not the right ones". They claim that what is really done is not for benefit of the local people at large, but for the benefit of a small Altaian elite. They say that the authorities will organise commercial hunting on its territory; and that the land has actually already been sold illegally to investors from outside the Republic. As a land reform in the Russian Federation is on its way right now, such arguments feed into fears of local people concerned with their economic survival.

For the larger local audience, however, the Karakol *Ak jaŋ* opposition is not exclusively phrased in political terms—the religious arguments take the foreground here. The leaflets and informants' messages in the Altaian language, in particular, contain the information that the park and tourism are against the wishes of the spirits. One of the 'informants' of the *Ak jaŋ* movement, in response to my question regarding the movement's attitude to the nature park,

---

park but during them Mamyev did not manage to convince people that the nature park was a good idea. He decided to go ahead with the project anyway, as he did not see any other way to prevent the land from being sold to outsiders. He hoped (as he told me) that people would come to appreciate his deeds, on the basis of the results. To my suggestion that this is precisely what makes Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members angry, as they feel that there are things happening to them without their knowledge and control, he replied with a well-known culturalist argument, that this is how things are done in Altai and western notions of participation and democracy cannot be applied in Asia.

went into a kind of mild trance and received the following message: Altai cannot be saved by dividing it into parts; Altai is sacred as a whole and imposing borders and delineating sacred places offends the spirits; dividing Altai is the beginning of the end to its sacredness; the spirits revealed that the park will be harmful for the Altai in the long run.

## CONCLUSION
## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BUILDING A SHRINE AND CREATING A NATURE PARK?

In this chapter I have argued that two, apparently distinct, conflicts can be analysed within the same framework. Although the first conflict described above is seemingly about competition between different religious regimes, and the second about control over land, the arguments of the interested parties have many common points.

From the point of view of Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members, both contemporary Altaian Buddhism and the contemporary Altaian nature parks movement are elitist projects aimed at securing various kinds of material and ideological resources for a currently privileged elite. At the same time, both projects are accused of violating principles of Altaian religious life. Interestingly, the argumentation of the proponents of Buddhism and of nature parks also involves two kinds of arguments, political and spiritual. Many supporters of Buddhism, while obviously underlining the spiritual richness of the religion, also say that its acceptance would be beneficial for the political future of the Republic of Altai. Similarly, Danil Mamyev, the main actor behind the establishment of Karakol nature park, while pointing out the political and economic advantages of the park, backs up his project with arguments involving principles of the Altaian worldview and practices of land worship.

What links all the Altaian parties involved in these conflicts is their attitude towards the land, its use and its ownership. All the parties would agree with the statement that land is the most important aspect of life in the contemporary Altai, including its religious dimensions. Hence, the conflicts described in this article are not between people with dramatically different views of the significance of land and its interactions with humans. They all see the Altai as a living entity influencing people, even as not separable

from humans. Hence, the cases analysed above are different to the ones described in much of the literature concerning conflicts over land, in which the stakeholders regard the land from radically different standpoints. Here, in these intra-Altaian conflicts, land is sacred for all parties.

Nevertheless, the conflicts between different Altaian groups are actually induced by the presence and interests in the Altai of parties who do not share the Altaian religious attitude towards the land. Most important among these is the Russian state, with its land reforms, nation-based administrative divisions and ever-changing legal system. The current political and legal situation forces people to take action, because they perceive themselves to be in danger of losing control over economic, spiritual and political resources. The lack of stability, especially at the level of legislation, makes people act fast and boldly, as they feel that the laws can change at any time; while there is a chance to secure some resources, they should do so. The Altaians referred to in this article say that otherwise it would be too late and they would lose control over their future and dissolve into the crowd of incomers interested in the Altai for economic or spiritual reasons.[20]

Would one not, then, expect that the Altaians interested in the Karakol valley for spiritual, economic or historical reasons would unite in the face of the present challenges? This case shows that the different subgroups all claim to speak for similar ethnic and national interests. They all claim to present the best Altaian interests with regard to economy and politics and they back their claims with reference to 'traditional knowledge'.[21] They all claim to be committed to 'Altaian traditional values'. However, it seems that this expression is impossibly general, if not empty. In practice, more important then a common ground of land worship are the social and economic differences between the involved parties. The conflicts analysed above are much more about different economic and class interests then deep ideological differences concerning the land. The Karakol *Ak jaŋ* movement sees itself as the voice of the overlooked,

[20] For an analysis of the image of Altai as a spiritually powerful place in the contemporary imagery in Russia and beyond see McCannon (2002) and Halemba (2006).

[21] This notion has time and again been analysed and criticised in anthropological writing, especially in the field of development, ecological and applied anthropology (Sillitoe 1998; Nadasady 1999).

the ones who feel that they are left invisible, powerless and misrepresented by the new Altaian religious, economic and political elite. For them, there is no difference between building a shrine (or a Buddhist *stūpa*) and creating a nature park. From Karakol *Ak jaŋ* members' point of view these are both elitist projects which have the ultimate goal of rendering the inhabitants of the valley powerless.

## REFERENCES


Abaeva, L. 1992. *Kul't gor i buddizm v Buryatii.* Moscow: Nauka.

Baskakov, N.A. 1947. *Oirotsko-russkii slovar.* Moscow.

Borodaev, V. and A. Kontev 1999. Monastyr' Ablai-khit kak pamyatnik sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii oiratov XVII v. *In* V. Barmin, V. Boiko, L. Ermakova and L. Semikhacheva (eds), *Rossiya, Sibir' i Tsentralnaya Asiya (vzaimodeistvie narodov i kul'tur).* Barnaul: Barnaul'skii Gosudartvennyi Pedagogicheskii Universitet.

Broz, L. forthcoming. Conversion to Religion? Becoming a Real Nation in Contemporary Altai. *In* M. Pelkmans (ed.) *Conversion After Socialism: Disruptions, Modernities, and the Technologies of Faith.* Oxford: Berghahn.

Buffetrille, K. 1996. One day the mountains will go away… Preliminary remarks on the flying mountains of Tibet. *In* A. Blondeau and E. Steinkellner (eds), *Reflections of the Mountain: essays on the history and social meaning of the mountains cult in Tibet and the Himalaya.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Collins, D. 1993. Burkhanism. *Modern Encyclopaedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union,* vol.3. Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press.

Donahoe B. and A. Halemba 2006. Die indigenen Völker Sibiriens: Landrechte, Legalismus und Lebensstil. *INFOE Magazine*, 19: 18–22.

Gyalbo, T., G. Hazod and P.K. Sørensen 2000. *Civilization at the foot of Mount Sham-po: the royal house of lHa Bug-pa-can and the history of g.Ya'-bzang.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Halemba, A. 2006. *The Telengits of Southern Siberia. Landscape, Religion and Knowledge in Motion.* London: Routledge.

Hamayon, R. 1994. Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-Power in Society. *In* N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (eds), *Shamanism, History and the State.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Humphrey, C. 1996. *Shamans and Elders. Experience, Knowledge and Power among the Daur Mongols.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kolarz, W. 1954. *Peoples of the Soviet Far East.* London: G. Philip.

Mamyev, D. 2003. Dukhovnaya ekologiya. In *Dukhovnaya kul-tura Altaya–ekologiya zhizni.* Gorno Altaisk: Obshchestvennoe Ob'edinenie "Szkola Ekologii Dushi *Tengi*".

McCannon, J. 2002. By the Shores of White Waters: The Altai and Its Place in the Spiritual Geopolitics of Nicholas Roerich. *Sibirica: Journal of Siberian Studies*, 2: 167–90.

Nadasdy, P. 1999. The Politics of TEK: Power and the 'Integration of Knowledge. *Arctic Anthropology*, 36(1–2): 1–18.

Potapov, L. 1953. *Ocherki po istorii altaitsev.* Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.

Sabin, D. 1980. Spisok vzyatykh na uchet v 1980 godu pamyatnikov no Kosh-Agachskomu raionu Respubliki Altai. Unpublished manuscript, Kosh Agach.

Sagalaev, A.M. 1984. *Mifologiya i verovaniya altaitsev: tsentral'no-aziatskie vliyaniya.* Novosibirsk: Nauka.

Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Sillitoe, P. 1998. The Development of Indigenous Knowledge. *Current Anthropology*, 39(2): 223–52.

Sneath, D. 1990. The oboo ceremony in Inner Mongolia: cultural meaning and social practice. *In* G. Bethlenfalvy, A. Birtalan, A. Sarközi and J. Vinkovics (eds), *Altaic Religious Beliefs and Practices.* Budapest: Lorand University.

Sørensen, P.K. 1994. *The mirror illuminating the royal genealogies: Tibetan Buddhist historiography: an annotated translation of the XIV*$^{th}$ *century Tibetan chronicle: rGyal-rabs gsal- ba'i me-long.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Tatar, M. 1976. Two Mongol texts concerning the cult of the mountains. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXX: 1–58.

Tuykhteneva, S.P. 1995. Ob evolutsii kul'ta gor u altaitsev. *In* D. Funk (ed.) *Shamanizm i pannie religioznye predstavleniya.* Moscow: Rossiiskaya Akademiya Nauk.

Vinogradov, A. 1999. After the Past, Before the Present: New Shamanism in Gorny Altai. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 10(4): 36–44.

—— 2002. The role and development of Shamanistic discourse among Southern Siberian ethnic groups in the Post-Soviet period. *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 20(2): 109–18.

—— 2003. *Ak Jang in the Context of Altai Religious Tradition*. University of Saskatchewan. MA thesis. Available at http://library.usask.ca/theses/available/etd-01192005-154827/

Wangdu, P. and H. Diemberger 2000. *dBa' bzhed: the royal narrative concerning the bringing of the Buddha's doctrine to Tibet.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Znamenski, A.A. 1999. *Shamanism and Christianity: native encounters with Russian Orthodox missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820–1917.* Westport, London: Greenwood Press.

# THE MUSLIM COOK, THE TIBETAN CLIENT, HIS LAMA AND THEIR BOYCOTT: MODERN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES OF ANTI-MUSLIM ECONOMIC ACTIVISM IN AMDO

ANDREW MARTIN FISCHER

## INTRODUCTION

Tibet scholars rarely tread upon the subject of strife between Tibetans and Chinese Muslims. This is likely due to the fact that such strife in Tibet is a taboo subject inside and outside China.[1] The official line in China is that interethnic relations are harmonious. Alternative views, particularly with respect to contemporary conflicts between Tibetans and Muslims in Northeast Tibet (Amdo), are treated with much sensitivity, with the result that Chinese, Tibetan and foreign scholars working in Tibet usually practise self-censorship on the subject. In the Tibetan exile community the subject is similarly avoided as it reveals a dark underside of Tibetan nationalism. Instead, most references to Muslims in publications from the exile community or from supportive western scholars tend to focus exclusively on the small Muslim communities that settled in Lhasa and other towns of Central Tibet prior to the Chinese take-over in 1950 (e.g. Cabezon 1997: 13–34). These are euphemistically referred to as 'Tibetan Muslims' and their relations with local Tibetans were, indeed, harmonious. However, this literature tends to ignore the military confrontations that took place between Tibetans and certain Chinese Muslim warlords in Amdo as recently as the 1930s and 1940s. They also sidestep the fact that during the reforms of the last two decades, Tibetan aggression has come to be increasingly directed against the Muslim minority in Tibet, despite

[1] In this paper, 'China' refers to the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and 'Tibet' refers to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) *and* the Tibetan areas that have been incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

the fact that Han Chinese present by far the strongest exclusionary force in the local economy.

This chapter addresses these issues with a specific focus on the role of lamas and religious discourse, complementing my previous working paper on the political economy of recent anti-Muslim boycotts by Amdo Tibetans (Fischer 2005b). In that paper I reflected on theories of ethnic conflict, such as primordialism and essentialism—which emphasise the deeply entrenched if not intractable historical roots of interethnic animosity—and instrumentalism and constructivism—which emphasise invented traditions and contemporary factors, such as elite manipulation of ethnic identities in the pursuit of political or economic interests as factors which drive conflict. I argued that each of these theories alone is largely inadequate to explain or predict the evolution of ethnic conflict, insofar as they seek to identify and isolate underlying explanatory variables, such as strong/ weak states versus weak/strong societies, ethno-linguistic or religious fragmentation and enclave economies. Instead, ethnic conflicts are generally the outcome of complex historical continuities that possess both inheritance and creativity, with the result that various theoretical stances can be taken towards any particular case. For example, current Tibetan-Muslim conflict can be easily interpreted either as primordialist, on the basis of deeply entrenched patterns of Tibetan-Muslim encounters, or as constructivist or instrumentalist, on the basis of political economy considerations inherent in the modern period.

As an alternative, I suggested that these theoretical views can be more aptly synthesised through a focus on the processual factors of exclusion and the impulse for social protection, which mould or guide conflictive encounters between groups, whether the conflicts themselves be deemed of a primordial or other nature. Under this light, ethnic conflict can be analysed as one possible outcome of the impulse for social protection, conditioned by the exclusionary propensities that accompany social change, and framed within the normative dimensions of social action and order. The advantage of this perspective is that it emphasises the processual factors that create the conditions for the conflictive dimensions, inherent in any relationship or social order, to degenerate or become exacerbated.

In this chapter I illustrate and develop this approach to Tibetan-Muslim conflict, basing my analysis on extensive interviews conducted with two reincarnate lamas in Amdo in 2004, along with

more general insights from fieldwork in Tibet from 2003 to 2005 and in Tibetan refugee communities in India from 1995 to 2001. The interviews demonstrate the role of religious elites in moulding political discourse about ethnic conflict in a manner which synthesises the historical continuities and the modern changes that have affected the ethnic power balance within the local political economy of Amdo. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first provides a brief background to Tibetan-Muslim relations in Amdo. The second delves deeper into the related discourse of religious elites. Theoretical ramifications are explored further in the conclusion.

## TIBETAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN AMDO

### *A Brief Historical Background*

Since the time of the Tibetan empire in the seventh century, Tibetan relations with Muslims have been fluid and contested, by no means following some stable pattern of either harmony or animosity (Fischer 2005b). Nonetheless, up until the late nineteenth century, there were fairly consistent conceptions and structures of hierarchy and power relations within the Tibetan areas, where Tibetans ruled the turf and controlled land-based wealth, while Muslims generally played subordinate economic roles, mainly specialising in trade, commerce and certain services. In Amdo this started to erode around the end of the nineteenth century with the breakdown of imperial China and the emergence of the modern Chinese nation. Following the victory of the Communists in China and, in particular, during the radicalisation of Maoism from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, this erosion was, for a time, overshadowed.

Amdo has long served as an important interface for Tibetan-Muslim relations due to the borderland location of its main population centres alongside, or in, the historic Gansu province[2] which, in turn, is one of the main centres of Chinese Muslims. In the past, Gansu also held a strategic position as a crossroads of the Silk Road and subsequently became one of the main conduits for Muslim

[2] The historic Gansu province included present-day Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, present-day Gansu Province, and the north-east corner of Qinghai, known as Huangzhong. See Lipman (1997) for further discussion of this region.

migration from Central Asia into China. The Muslim centre of Hezhou, today called Linxia in modern Gansu Province and known euphemistically as 'the Chinese Mecca', is very close to the extensive Labrang monastic complex (Ch. Xiahe), one of the largest Tibetan monasteries outside Lhasa. Further south in Gansu the Muslim community in Taozhou (today known as Lintan) neighbours the influential Tibetan monastery of Chone. Nearby in Qinghai the Salar Muslims are said to have settled and intermarried with local Tibetans as early as the thirteenth century, in what is now the Xunhua Salar Autonomous County.[3] This county is surrounded by traditionally Tibetan areas and includes four Tibetan townships and the birthplace of the late Tenth Panchen Lama. It borders Rebgong, the county that seats Rongwo Monastery, another power and religious centre of Amdo. Kumbum, the other major monastery in this part of Amdo, founded in the sixteenth century by the Third Dalai Lama, is very close to Xining City, which had been a Chinese garrison town since at least the twelfth century, with large Muslim populations on its outskirts for almost as long. Thus ironically, although Amdo Tibetans see Muslims as outsiders in Amdo, most are indigenous to very proximate regions and many hail from families that have been residing in Tibetan towns for over a century, if not several.

This Tibetan-Muslim interface in Amdo has involved extensive cooperative synergies. Muslims have filled specialised economic roles which continue to the present. Traditionally, they were based in market towns and moved between pastoral and agricultural zones as traders, merchants, middlemen, brokers and translators (Lipman 1997: 13). They controlled much of the trade in livestock products, particularly wool and hides, and also worked as butchers or caterers for Tibetans. In many cases Muslims were invited by Tibetan rulers to fill these specialised roles, and their settlements and trade routes influenced the development of many Amdo Tibetan towns.[4] Correspondingly, intermarriage was relatively common between Tibetans and local Muslims, many of whom spoke Tibetan, Mongolic or Turkic dialects. Intermarriage was also common with Mongolians and Mongours, who were mostly Tibetan-Buddhist, and with local Han Chinese, many of whom were also Buddhist.

---

[3] Interview with Dr Ma Cheng Jun (a Salar professor), Xining, June 2004.

[4] For the example of Rongwo Town in Rebgong, see Yi (2005).

Unlike the present day, the trading and service roles of Muslims would not formerly have been perceived as a threat by Tibetans, given that their occupations were generally stigmatised by Tibetans. This included reliance on petty trade as one's sole means of livelihood; while Tibetans do engage in trade and monasteries were often heavily involved in lucrative trading ventures such as the tea trade, the occupation of trader, particularly in the nomadic areas, was regarded as lower than that of a farmer or herder. In this regard, Tibetans, particularly nomads, with their abundant land in comparison to neighbouring Muslim and Chinese areas, were relatively wealthy. It has only been since the 1980s that Muslims have come to achieve a perceived economic superiority over Tibetan farmers and herders. This was expressed to me by numerous Tibetans and Muslims during fieldwork, including several Muslim scholars. These perceptions of status and displacement are discussed further below.

Certain Tibetan-Muslim tensions in Amdo were caused by the rise of Muslim militancy in north-west China during the demise of the Ming dynasty in the seventeenth century, which coincided with the spread of Sufism into Gansu (Lipman 1997: 53–57). In particular, Xining, Xunhua and Hezhou became key organisational hubs for the Sufi movement through the missionary and political activism of several charismatic sheikhs from Central Asia (1997: 64–65). This activism particularly emphasised the conversion of non-Muslims, with some success among Tibetans, Mongols, Turks and Chinese (Gladney 1991: 59; Lipman 1997: 63, 67). Indeed, the history of Muslim proselytising was noted to me during the interviews I conducted with several Tibetan scholars and lamas. Thus, rising Muslim influence gradually came to contest local Tibetan/Buddhist dominance.

Muslim activism likely encouraged Tibetan Buddhist elites to strengthen their own political power bases. Labrang Monastery was founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century and was developed into a local power centre within a nexus of Tibetan, Mongolian and Qing patronage (Nietupski 2002). Up to the Muslim uprisings in the second half of the nineteenth century, local Tibetan rulers managed to hold the upper hand of Manchu favour under the imperial policy of using minorities to rule minorities in the borderlands. For instance, Tibetan armies or militias often assisted the Qing military in pacification campaigns against Muslim rebellions.

It should, however, be noted that this particular configuration of ethnic alliances was not stable. Both Chinese and Tibetans had joined earlier Muslim uprisings in the north-west, during the demise of the Ming dynasty in the mid-seventeenth century, and loyal Muslim forces were also often used in Qing pacification campaigns to put down rebellious Muslims, with loyal Muslims often fighting side by side with Tibetans, Mongols and Chinese (Lipman 1997: 135). Alliances were also notably local, such as in Taozhou in southern Gansu, which, unlike the Muslim areas further north, was quite isolated and surrounded by Tibetan territory. Lipman argues that this encouraged a much more cooperative interaction throughout the centuries with Tibetans in nearby Chone and Labrang, as well as with the Chinese (1997: 152).[5]

The patronage-based ethnic power balance changed towards the end of the Qing dynasty. Several Muslim warlord families in Gansu remained loyal to the Qing dynasty during a series of Muslim uprisings in the second half of the nineteenth century and they subsequently profited from Qing, and later Nationalist, patronage and military co-dependence (Lipmann 1997: 171). The rise to power of the Ma family in the north-east corner of Qinghai (Ma Qi followed by his nephew Ma Bufang) in the first part of the twentieth century was particularly relevant for Amdo Tibetans. Ma Qi was appointed by the Nationalists as governor of the newly created province of Qinghai in 1928. Ma Bufang took over leadership following the death of his uncle in 1931 and “established essentially a separate, and Islamic, state-within-a-state in Qinghai under the Republic”, relying heavily on the Hui and Salar in the administration and military, while excluding Tibetans, Mongours and Mongols (Goodman 2004: 386).

The creation of Qinghai nominally incorporated large parts of the vast Tibetan territories of Amdo and Kham (Yushu), which had hitherto never been incorporated into the historic Gansu province beyond the granting of symbolic imperial titles by the Manchu (Horlemann 2002: 246). Ma Bufang attempted to enforce the obedience of these territories through punitive military campaigns, which in turn were faced with resistance. Counter-offensives tended

[5] Interestingly, one foreign researcher working in Machu, a nomadic area near Chone, reported to me in 2004 that there had not been much evidence of either boycott or anti-Muslim sentiment in the area, in stark contrast to the events I describe later in this chapter, which possibly illustrates the influence of these earlier cooperative relations.

to be violent, often involving the destruction of monasteries and the sacking of towns. For instance, the main monastery of Xinghai in Tsolho (Ch. Hainan) Prefecture was apparently sacked and destroyed at this time, along with the town and monastery of Jigdrel in Golok, which had fiercely resisted Ma's army. Many Tibetans that I interviewed in Chabcha in 2004 had relatives who had been executed by Ma during this period. Similar accounts were given to me by a variety of local Tibetans, including several scholars in Xining, Rebgong, Chentsa, Chabcha, Guinan, Yushu and Golok. All conceded that most of Qinghai eventually submitted, although it seems that about half of Golok was never subdued.

Ma adopted policies of 'ethnic cleansing' and forced conversion, which brought about a reconfiguration of territory, population and even ethnicity in and around the north-east corner of Qinghai.[6] Particularly targeted were Hualong, Xunhua and Minhe Counties, where Ma sourced his Muslim power base amidst sizeable surrounding Tibetan populations.[7] Many Tibetans were forcibly converted to Islam and assimilated into Muslim communities, or else they were forced off the more centrally located lands and into higher altitude hinterlands of the counties, or outside these counties altogether. Ma attempted to extend his policies of ethnic cleansing further south across the Yellow River, resulting in military confrontations with neighbouring Tibetan rulers in Chentsa and Rebgong. According to my informants from these areas, the current ethnic distributions, with Muslims on the north bank of the Yellow River in Hualong and Tibetans on the south bank in Chentsa, along with pockets of Muslims in the north part of Chentsa, was wrought by these confrontations.

These aggressive policies also created an exodus of both Tibetans and Muslims from these core counties. Many refugees were permitted by Ma to relocate to the west of Huangzhong, in the region

---

[6] Goodman (2004: 386) notes that Ma Bufang apparently "undertook a campaign of ethnic cleansing amongst the Tibetans in the northeast and eastern fringes of the province." He does not qualify this use of the term 'ethnic cleansing', nor the regions in question, and he derives the source from a Chinese historical study, *Ma Bufang in Qinghai, 1931–1949*, from the Qinghai People's Publishing House. I have built up my own understanding of these events from interviews with a variety of Tibetan, Muslim and Chinese scholars and elderly locals during fieldwork.

[7] Even today Tibetans account for about one quarter of the population of Hualong Hui Autonomous County and the county, in fact, contains the largest population of Tibetans of any county in Qinghai.

that is today known as the Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, including Chabcha, Guinan, Guide and Xinghai Counties. Tibetan scholars told me that the refugees were mostly farmers and they established themselves in areas that had hitherto been purely nomadic, creating conflict with the nomads. Interethnic conflict thus reshaped land use among Tibetans in areas that were not even adjacent to Muslim regions, which in turn generated considerable contestation among Tibetans themselves. Muslims also followed into Tsolho and other Tibetan areas during this time, in particular settling around the main town of Chabcha and accounting for many of the Muslim households that are rural and agrarian in this area. As argued by Lipman (1997) and noted earlier, it is important to break down the stereotype of Muslim unity in this period, as many of these migrating Muslims were themselves refugees fleeing the autarkic rule of the Ma clan.[8]

Given that the energies of the Nationalist government in China were monopolised by Japanese invasion and civil war from the 1930s, Communist victory in 1949 was the first time that modern China had the ability to enforce direct rule on these areas. The subsequent administrative and economic reorganisation of the rural areas by the Communists had the effect of fixing the de facto configurations of these ethnic power struggles as they had evolved up to the 1950s. Territory was reconstituted in the 1950s into autonomous prefectures, counties and townships, designated on the basis of the de facto distribution of ethnic groups in the 1950s. Even the individual administrative ethnic status of persons was designated, based on the de facto evolution of religious affiliation up the 1950s. For instance, the Tibetans in Hualong, who converted to Islam during the time of Ma Bufang, would have been labelled Hui rather than Tibetan, even if they had remained culturally and linguistically

[8] Lipman (1997) argues against this stereotype throughout his book. For instance, similar cross-cutting of ethnic solidarity also occurred during the Muslim attacks on the Xidaotang Muslim compounds of Taozhou in the late 1920s. The Xidaotang was a successful religio-commercial collective operation, which had close relations with local Tibetans, in particular with the religious and political leadership at Choni and Labrang. Thus, when Ma Zhongying, a Xining Muslim military adventurer from the Ma Qi family, attacked Taozhou in the late 1920s, local Tibetans fought alongside local Muslims against the attack and protected and supported the Xidaotang members once they fled into Tibetan territory (Lipman 1997: 196–97).

Tibetan in most other respects.[9] Part of Tibetan discontent during the early Communist period, besides the upheaval and bloodshed, derived from the fact that the fixing of territory and identity took place at a time when Tibetans were in a subordinate position to the Muslim warlords.

As numerous people explained to me during interviews in the area, and as also confirmed by Goodman (2004: 387), the early Communist leadership apparently misinterpreted the complex dynamics of interethnic relations in Amdo. For instance, it seems that they had calculated that the Amdo Tibetans would support them, because they had defeated Ma Bufang in 1949, but they were faced by resistance from both Tibetans and Muslims from the mid-1950s. The main points of contention for both groups were the radical socialist fast forward into collectivisation and the dismantling of the influence of religious institutions, both of which started in earnest in the mid-1950s and reneged on earlier promises made by the Chinese Communist Party (see also Goldstein 1989, 1998; Tsering Shakya 1999). As a result, armed resistance in Amdo reached its peak in 1958, when several Tibetan regions broke out into full-scale guerrilla warfare, simultaneously with an uprising organised by a Salar Muslim in Xunhua. Both were met by a heavy counterinsurgency campaign mounted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

With the advent of the reform period in the late 1970s, however, tensions between local Tibetans and Muslims have gradually remerged as one of the dominant foci of contestation within Amdo. Conflicts with Muslims, including occasional outbreaks of violence, have been notably social, dealing with day-to-day interactions, often over issues of trade and commerce. Tibetans commonly claim that Muslim traders cheat, charge unfair prices, give fake money, and so forth. These accusations were confirmed in an interview with a Salar Muslim professor in Xining in June 2004. He apologetically explained that many local Muslims had taken advantage of the ignorance of Tibetans in many remote areas of Qinghai, during the opening of these areas over the previous twenty years, thereby creating a bad impression of Muslims in general. Their knowledge of the Tibetan language facilitated such acts of fraud and cheating. He insisted, though, that these cases were exceptions and that, by and

[9] This is ironic for, as noted by Lipman (1997: xx), the Chinese Communist theory of nationality inherited from Stalin claims to determine nationality independent of religious considerations.

large, relations between Tibetans and Muslims are harmonious. In particular, he blamed cheating on Muslims from outside the community, insisting that Muslims who are settled within Tibetan towns and running established businesses have harmonious (or at least neutral and respectful) relationships with their Tibetan neighbours. Indeed, the Tibetans I interviewed in Chentsa in 2004 confirmed that Chentsa Muslims had not been involved in the outbreak of Tibetan-Muslim violence in January 2003. The guilty Muslims were all from a village just across the Yellow River in Hualong.

Tibetan accusations also extend beyond bad business practices, however. Muslims are often accused of crime, particularly in the counties that straddle the Muslim and Tibetan areas and that contain significant populations of both, such as Chentsa and Hualong. It was reported to me by local Tibetans, Chinese and Muslims, including one professor and one Chinese government official, that opposite Chentsa Town in Hualong there is one famous Muslim village well known for its sophisticated motorcycle theft ring. Smaller Muslim motorcycle theft rings apparently also operate within Chentsa County. Another village in Hualong, the one that entered into conflict with Chentsa Town in 2003, is known as a smuggling centre for drugs and arms. Similarly, Muslims are also accused of serving soiled food or even poisoning, as I discuss further below. Local conflicts have flared up with respect to the 'purchase' (most likely long-term lease) of land for building mosques or cemeteries near Tibetan towns, with two well-known episodes taking place in Rebgong in the early 2000s. All of these grumblings coalesced to form a perception on the part of Tibetans that Muslims had been increasingly dominating the liberalising economies of the Tibetan areas, specifically in the tertiary businesses of trade, transport and catering, which led to a regional boycott of Muslim businesses in 2003.

## *Economic Foundations of Discontent in the Reform Period*

The economic foundations for these perceptions rest on two issues that are residual to the rapid state (and Chinese) led growth of the Tibetan areas (Fischer 2005b: 12–16). One has been the marked economic advantage accrued during the reform period to the

activities that have traditionally been the specialisation of Muslims, rather than Tibetans, that is trade, commerce and services versus farming and herding. This became significant when wool prices fell sharply throughout the 1990s, to the point that wool production has been rendered almost worthless, even though a fair profit can still be earned by wool trading or processing. Tibetan producers have been penalised by recent economic transformations, whereas Muslims have not.

Furthermore, the liberalisation of the wool trade has occurred alongside an increasing presence of Muslims in the Tibetan areas, many of whom had not previously been settled within any particular Tibetan community, although generally being native to the larger Qinghai-Gansu region. Many reverted to their traditional wool trading role with the lifting of restrictions on migration, markets and individual entrepreneurship from the beginning of the reform period, often completely taking over the state's role in commodity trading by purchasing privatised trading companies.

Therefore, by the time wool prices started to collapse in the 1990s, in the midst of a range of other liberalisations, the face mediating the collapse was the private Muslim trader, not the local Chinese or Tibetan official. Whether or not Muslims engaged in unfair trading practices, Tibetan discontent was undoubtedly felt and expressed in their trading interactions with Muslims. For this reason, many of the accounts of fighting between Tibetans and Muslims that I collected during field work, particularly in nomadic areas, pertained to the wool trade and, in particular, wool prices. On several occasions, Tibetans told me how Muslim traders would charge a price which then turned out to be less than the fair market price. As the story is told, the Tibetan realises this once he or she travels outside the Tibetan areas and realises that wool prices are, in fact, much higher. Of course, much of such price difference might simply represent that between farm gate, wholesale and retail pricing, and may not imply cheating. Furthermore, Tibetan herders are not necessarily an innocent lot either; on several occasions I have heard of a fairly common practice of dirtying sheep wool in order to make it heavier before a sale.

The second issue of contention has been the uptake by Muslims of new, albeit limited, economic opportunities in the rapidly-growing towns of Amdo. In particular, the rising dominance of Muslims in local wool processing industries since the 1990s has intensified

competition in the remaining areas of economic activity. The only areas of urban employment where most Tibetans could conceivably compete are low-skilled construction work, petty trade and commerce, or catering, transport and other services. In certain locations tourism can be added to this list. Yet these are precisely the activities in which Muslim migrants have also entered into the employment foray in Tibetan towns, taking advantage of their larger regional trading networks and more astute business acumen. A further hurdle relates to the fact that, as mentioned previously, a dependence on manual wage labour or trade and commerce for livelihood is generally stigmatised by Amdo Tibetans. The culmination of all of these factors has been the sidelining of Tibetans from even those residual low-skill opportunities that have arisen in the new economies. Conversely, Muslims are perceived as disproportionately advantaged (Fischer 2005b).

Effectively, these issues are contentious for Tibetans because they challenge their deep-seated notions of hierarchy and their pride in the superiority of farm or pastoral labour over wage or commercial labour. Ironically, these notions were preserved up until the reform period. The challenge works across class, from the level of farmers and nomads up to educated elites. Tibetan elites are undoubtedly better placed to weather changes in the local economy, although even in their case employment security has eroded considerably since the 1990s, particularly since the end of guaranteed employment for high school and university graduates in 2001. Notably, official government employment strategies for laid-off state-sector employees or unemployed graduates are largely based on efforts to encourage self-employment in the start-up of small private businesses. Several unemployed graduates from Chentsa, Chabcha and Rebgong explained to me that the county governments in each location were offering them an unemployment welfare benefit of 150 yuan a month, conditional on their attendance at government-run workshops teaching them how to start and run a business, based on a handbook from the International Labour Organisation that had been translated into Chinese. Such strategies imply a downward mobility in the Tibetan labour hierarchy, from the coveted high status occupations in the state sector (including teaching) towards a stratum occupied by and competing with Muslim merchants. This irks the dignity of the once-privileged Tibetan state sector employees, as well as the graduates aspiring for upward-mobility. Given that these

erstwhile or aspiring elites are also keenly aware of the need for their non-elite rural compatriots to move up the economic hierarchy in the towns, a common purpose has coalesced across class within these Tibetan communities, with its target the Muslim businesses.

### *Enter the Boycott*

The idea of boycotting Muslim businesses appears to have developed in different pockets of Amdo in the 1990s, if not before. Inspiration possibly derived from the exile community in South Asia, due to the active promotion of the Gandhian concepts of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) and *Swaraj* (self-rule) by Samdhong Rimpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile, as possible strategies to take against the increasingly marketized Chinese rule during the reform period. Other influences probably include similar activism either in history or else in other locations across the Tibeto-Buddhist world.[10] Given the regular travel and exchange of Tibetans back and forth between Tibet and the exile community since the 1980s, I suspect that the resemblance of the Muslim boycott movement in Amdo to Gandhian social activism is no coincidence.[11]

However, the boycott only escalated into a regional movement following a clash between Tibetans and Muslims in Chentsa County in January 2003. One account of this clash was reported in the western media (CNN 2003). In the CNN account, the clash began when a group of Tibetan and Muslim youths bickered over a game of billiards. However, Chentsa Tibetans claimed to me that it started when some Hui youths stole a motorcycle from some Tibetans. Fighting ensued until one fifty-year old Tibetan was stabbed to death with a skewer by two Hui youths, and then hundreds of Tibetans went rioting in the town, destroying Muslim-owned property. The military was quickly called in. From my field work, I was able to ascertain that the older man who died was a village leader who had come to mediate the clash. All of the Muslims who were fighting were from the village across the Yellow River in Hualong County

[10] On Ladakh see van Beek (2000).

[11] Despite the official rhetoric in China, there is a continual and ongoing interaction between Tibetans in Tibet and India. I have found that Tibetan elites all over Tibet, as well as in Beijing, are fully versed in current political and religious matters in India.

called Bagyathang, which is known as a contraband centre for drug and arms smuggling. None of the Muslim residents of Chentsa County were involved. The security presence remained for several months. This event, which occurred around the same time as several other Tibetan-Muslim clashes in other parts of Amdo, appears to have acted as a catalyst and rallying cry for the boycott to be taken up as a regionally coordinated political movement, spreading as far south as Lhasa and Kham.

The standard rational for the boycotts, which was given to me by a variety of students, scholars and officials, and which was echoed in many conversations with Tibetan farmers, was that if Tibetans would not spend their money in Muslim businesses in Tibetan areas (which largely cater to Tibetans), then Muslim businesses would not survive and the Muslims would leave. Moral legitimacy was given to this argument by noting that the departure of Muslims would also reduce the amount of animal slaughter in the Tibetan areas, given that the abattoirs are largely run by Muslims. This latter argument is, apparently, often made by lamas. For instance, Holly Gayley has discussed how the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, a highly renowned lama throughout all of Tibet who was based in Serthar County in Sichuan (technically part of Amdo), had produced a video with footage of Muslim abattoirs. The video decried the Muslim treatment of animals and advocated vegetarianism.[12] Conversely, if Tibetans were to set up their own businesses and spend their money in them, they could capture the Muslim economic success.

Curiously, while similar arguments have been made with respect to Chinese migrants, the boycott idea seems only to have been directed at Muslims. This could be a sign of ‘primordialism’, a deeper cultural animosity towards Muslims and affinity with the Chinese. Or, it could equally be an expression of opportunism, given that any overt animosity towards Han Chinese would likely be treated harshly by the authorities. Moreover, there is much more Tibetan-Muslim competition across a variety of old and new economic activities. Muslims are closely integrated into the Tibetan economy, largely catering to Tibetan demand and plying their trades within Tibetan neighbourhoods. They also follow lifestyles that are much closer to Amdo Tibetans than those of the Chinese migrants. As a result, Muslims are much more visible and ‘in your face’ than

[12] Conference presentation, ‘The ethics of cultural survival’, 11th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, 2006.

the Chinese migrants, who tend to cluster around the more modern and sinicized sectors of Tibetan towns. From their own side, many Chinese migrants are directly or indirectly sustained by the local government, often attracted in the first place by relatives in the government, and any activism directed against them would be treated severely by the local authorities. In any case, whether due to some or all of these considerations, Muslims bear the brunt of economic activism, whereas Chinese migrants escape largely unscathed, or even benefit, given that they attract many of the clientele lost by the Muslim businesses.

Prior to 2003 boycotts appear to have been localised events, concentrated in a few townships within certain counties. Ngawa County has been especially important given the leadership of one lama, who has been particularly vocal in advocating the boycott.[13] Interestingly, Ngawa is known for its tradition of entrepreneurship in trade and Golok Tibetans often complained to me, in an argument that resembles their resentment towards Muslims, that Ngawa Tibetans dominate most of the Tibetan-run commerce in Golok, taking most of their profits with them back to neighbouring Ngawa.[14] Given that the Ngawa business community also extends strong financial support to the local monasteries, it is likely that this lama had at least several wealthy business sponsors.

Despite the local nature of these movements, they were well known throughout Amdo. Even in Central Tibet, far removed from Amdo, anti-Muslim sentiment was reportedly strong as early as the mid-1990s, if not before, resulting in several clashes, typically involving Muslim restaurants or other businesses. One western NGO worker, who had been living there in the 1990s, told me that in 1994 there was a rumour that “the Muslims were coming” to Lhasa, possibly referring to the liberalisation of migration to the TAR around that time. In early 1995 some Tibetans claimed to have found

[13] During my time in Amdo in 2004 I tried on many occasions to find the name of this particular lama, who is well known for his boycott advocacy. Ultimately, I was unsuccessful. Many Tibetans know about him, but all of those who I talked to either did not know his name, or else were not willing to divulge it, given the sensitivity of these issues in local politics. In general, reference to a ‘lama’ as an authoritative source is common in popular Tibetan discourse and carries much legitimising weight, even if the identity is unknown.

[14] The fact that Ngawa Tibetans seem to break the mould with respect to Tibetan stigmatisation of business and trade probably owes to their strategic location as a trade centre between Kham and Amdo, which they exploit even today.

a human finger in a soup served in a Muslim restaurant near the Jokhang Temple. This led Tibetans to claim that Muslims were practising cannibalism, a theme that was to return repeatedly during the later boycotts.

The boycott movement gathered regional momentum in January 2003, following the clash between Tibetans and Muslims in Chentsa Town. According to my informants from Chentsa and Rebgong, along with several Tibetan scholars in Xining, Tibetans widely believed that the resolution of this episode was biased in favour of the Muslims, which in turn stimulated a call to action, an incitement to take matters into their own hands. There was a broad consensus on the events: the Muslim man who was responsible for the killing of the Tibetan village leader was let off after his village made a compensation payment of 10,000 yuan to Chentsa. They compared the treatment in this case to another event, which apparently occurred in early 2004, when a famous Muslim motorcycle thief from a nearby village in Hualong attempted a night time raid on a Tibetan village in Chentsa, during which he was ambushed and beaten to death by the villagers. Following his death, the Tibetan village had to make a much larger compensation payment to the thief's Muslim village in Hualong, in addition to which twenty men from the village were arrested and detained.[15]

In any case, the clash in Chentsa Town served as a call to action for Tibetans. It seems that the bravado of Tibetans had also been stoked up by the events of 9/11, the Afghan war and the lead up to the Iraq war.[16] Soon afterwards a regional boycott of Muslim businesses gained momentum and even extended into areas of Kham that had little Muslim presence. Although Tibetans in Lhasa were hesitant to talk about it, the boycott evidently reached Central Tibet as well, finding an accord with the anti-Muslim sentiment already built up over the last decade. While the boycott was meant to target all types of Muslim businesses and trade interactions, including

[15] I discussed these cases with a senior Chinese official from the Huangnan Prefecture, who insisted that the government had tried to deal with each crime without discrimination, treating all equally under the law.

[16] I have rarely met a Tibetan in Tibet who is not an ardent supporter of Bush Junior. There are two reasons for this; one that he is perceived to act strongly against China, and the other that he attacked a Muslim tyrant (Saddam Hussein). The detonation of the two Buddha statues in Afghanistan in 2001 was well known to educated Tibetans and did not endear the Taliban to them either.

Muslim-owned buses, the symbolic focus became the Muslim restaurants that dominate catering throughout Amdo.

The boycott appears to have been strongest, most cohesive and most sustained in the more remote nomadic areas such as Golok, Yushu and Ngawa, in many cases continuing with force up until my last field visit in late 2004. In Golok the boycott took off with an event that occurred soon after the Chentsa clash, involving the poisoning of three Tibetans in a Muslim restaurant, one of whom died. The poisoning, which was recorded in the local newspaper, acted as a trigger for the boycott, although the question remains whether it took place after heavy handed harassment of the restaurant by bravado Tibetan youths. For instance, a western scholar who was living in Golok at the time, told me that some young Tibetan men, students from the secondary teacher-training school in Dawu, regularly harassed Muslim restaurant owners and other business people by, for instance, eating and walking out without paying, telling the owners to follow them into the street. This was essentially an invitation to a street fight in which the Muslims would be inevitably outnumbered. Much of such Tibetan youth bravado apparently involved the sons of county or prefecture officials, who acted with relative impunity. While I was in Amdo in 2004, several similar incidents were reported to me from Golok, such as a gang of Tibetans who destroyed the sign of a Muslim shop. The isolated shop owner simply had to watch, with little hope of police protection. The Western scholar who reported this to me also noted that most of the local police are Tibetan and tend to be biased against the Muslims. In any event, within a year of the poisoning, the local newspaper reported that the number of Muslim restaurants in the Prefecture of Golok had fallen from over seventy to just over twenty. Jigdrel Town was the first town of Golok to entirely rid itself of Muslim restaurants.

In the farming regions of Amdo that are closer to Muslim areas, such as Rebgong, Chentsa, Labrang and Chabcha, the boycott started with a bang but petered out within less than a year. In many cases the boycott was enforced with some degree of moralistic coercion by Tibetan activists, many of them monks. For instance, Tibetans found eating in Muslim restaurants were shamed or even beaten up afterwards on the street. In Rongwo Town, the seat of Rebgong County, it was reported that monks from the monastery would impose fines on people found eating in Muslim restaurants. I was even told that one

Tibetan businessman from Kham who was visiting Rongwo was so enthused by the spirit of the boycott that he happily agreed to pay a fine of 1000 yuan after being caught eating in a Muslim restaurant. In this way, Tibetans who were opposed to the boycott were silenced, or at least quietened, thereby generating an appearance of consensus. Nonetheless, the boycott gradually ran out of steam in these more central areas due to the difficulties of boycotting neighbours in towns that have had a long history of ethnic coexistence and where Muslims play an important symbiotic role in the local economy. Even in Golok, many Muslim restaurants were simply taken over by Chinese migrants from Sichuan or by Ngawa Tibetan businesspeople. Chinese restaurateurs often show their colours by advertising their new establishments as 'pork restaurants'. While very popular as a tasty alternative to Muslim food, the displacement of Muslim by Chinese restaurateurs generally defeated the more instrumental purpose of the boycott movement, which was to allow Tibetans the chance to enter into those areas of the urban service economy that had been hitherto dominated by Muslims. Nonetheless, there does appear to have been some expansion of Tibetan businesses in this regard.

Parallel to the rapid spread of the boycott, a racist mythology became widespread throughout Amdo. Most typical is what I have come to call 'The Tale of the Muslim Cook'. Its appearance, along with non-culinary spin-offs, seems to have taken place more or less around the time of the clash at Chentsa. In any case, whenever it was told to me the time reference was always recent, i.e. within the last year or two. According to the typical version, a Muslim cook prepared the food they served to Tibetans using their left-over dirty bath water, or they used the bath water of an imam. In the most extreme accounts, they put the ashes of the cremated bones of an imam, or even their parents, in the cooking water. It is said that according to Muslim belief, the use of ashes will cause the eater to convert to Islam or, at the very least, make him sympathise with Islam. However, all of the Muslims that I interviewed, including several scholars in Xining and one Hui Muslim secondary school teacher in Rebgong, insisted that there was no such belief among local Muslims.

An almost identical story was prevalent in many counties. Some tellers sourced the exact event to Ngawa County, others to the neighbouring county, and yet others to their own county. In one

rendition a Muslim cook was working for a Tibetan boss and business was very good. One day the Muslim decided to leave, after which business worsened. The boss phoned the cook and requested him to come back, at which point the cook told the boss that he would never come back and that all the while he had been cooking with his used bath water. It is told that this is how the Muslim practice of disrespect was uncovered. I was even told by several Tibetans in Rongwo that this event actually took place within the main monastery itself, which apparently employed a Muslim cook and a Tibetan woman helper. The cook threatened the woman that he would kill her if she snitched on him, until finally she gathered enough courage and told the monastery. I myself was suspicious of this story, given that monastery cooking is usually performed by the monks themselves. I asked a lama from the monastery about this and he denied that the monastery had employed a Muslim cook or that the event had ever taken place.

There were several non-culinary spin-offs. For instance, in Yushu it was said that passing Muslim motorists throw the ashes of cremated imams in the air, which then lands on, or is inhaled by, hapless Tibetan pedestrians and has the same effect as eating a tasty noodle soup. It does not seem to perturb these story tellers that Muslims do not, in fact, cremate the bodies of their dead, but bury them according to prescriptions given by the Koran. Indeed, Rebgong County itself has been the scene of several well-known conflicts over Muslim attempts to rent or buy land for cemeteries. However, none of the Tibetans that I interviewed seemed to have realised this logical fallacy. On one occasion, a Tibetan high school student from Chentsa even started to argue that Chentsa Muslims do, in fact, cremate their dead as a local custom. All the evidence to the contrary does not seem to prevent ongoing embellishments of the ashy versions of the myth.

These and similar perceptions of Muslims are not new among Tibetans. From discussions with other Tibet scholars, it seems that some of these prejudices have a long genealogy throughout Tibet. For instance, I was told by one researcher that racist rumours abounded in Lhasa in the mid-1990s. Tibetans were saying that Muslim bread was yellow because they urinated in it, that they put their scabs in their food, or else that they practised cannibalism and ate children. Lipman (1997) discusses the evolution of prejudice

against Muslims in China and Yi (2005) also offers a detailed account of prejudices against Muslims in Rebgong County.

What is striking in the Amdo events is the synchronicity between the boycott movement and the culinary racist myths, along with the rapid dissemination of both throughout most of Amdo within a matter of months, as reported to me by numerous Tibetans and western scholars. The most coherent explanation that I have managed to assemble is that the Muslim Cook myth was initiated, or at least encouraged, by certain Tibetan elites.[17] These included secular intellectuals from some of the main urban centres in and around Amdo, such as Chabcha, Rebgong, Xining and Lanzhou, along with religious leaders, such as the Ngawa lama mentioned above. The dissemination of the myth subsequently took place, knowingly or unknowingly, through students, businesspeople or others who travel regularly between these key urban centres and the dispersed villages and towns of Amdo and beyond. Notably, the clash in Chentsa occurred just before both the Tibetan and Chinese New Years when many Tibetans return to their home villages.

These elite actors can be broadly considered as part of a Tibetan intellectual community that circulates around both secular and religious institutions. The secular include the minority universities, research and cultural institutes, Tibetan newspapers, and other organisations, all of which have functioned within the PRC since the 1980s, as part of the promotion of nominal 'minority autonomy'. Many of these intellectuals maintain close formal or informal collaboration with monastic scholars, with whom they often also have family or other social ties. In turn, the same ties bind the communities into broader elite networks, principally those of Tibetan cadres and businesspeople, who in turn act to various degrees within the limited space sanctioned by the state to support the projects of the secular and religious intellectuals.

On the religious side, many people have been actively involved in boycott activism, from lamas down to heavy-handed monks. Even state authorities tacitly acknowledged the moral authority of lamas, and several key meetings with religious leaders were reportedly convened by the Qinghai government in efforts to diffuse the

[17] Sources included local and foreign scholars, Tibetan and Chinese officials, lamas and Tibetan journalists, teachers and students.

boycott.[18] In one meeting in Golok most of the leading lamas from the Prefecture were assembled in Dawu and officials requested them to tell the Golok Tibetans to eat in Muslim restaurants in the name of preserving interethnic harmony. It was said that one of the most senior lamas present at the meeting replied to the officials with the observation that Chinese and Muslim people never eat in Tibetan restaurants. He therefore concluded that they would tell their people to eat in Muslim restaurants only if the Chinese authorities would tell Chinese and Muslim people to eat in Tibetan restaurants. Whether or not this was an accurate rendition of the event, its popular repetition reflects the moral authority attributed to the lamas to dictate the terms and progression of the boycott.

According to the explanations that I assembled, many of these elites had been brewing the boycott idea for a while. In the midst of the frustration and agitation that followed the Chentsa clash, the myths were disseminated in various versions, playing on local events as a means to incite Tibetans to embark on a sustained regional movement. Previously, events such as Chentsa were capable of mobilising rural Tibetans into short-term bouts of localised retribution. However, these events had not catalysed more far reaching strategies. This required that Tibetans become motivated to strategically attack and take over the economic foundations of the Muslim advance into their local economies. However, in the view of various elite Tibetans, this logic had so far failed to motivate a largely undereducated Tibetan population. The myths were a means to this end: by instigating racist mania among the general population, which was possible due to pre-existing strong historical prejudices that Muslims were cheating, dirty and dangerous, elites were able to mobilise collective action and consumer power to address issues of economic marginalisation, and they were able to do this so long as the symbols of state power were not directly attacked.

The myth concoction, therefore, appears as a classic case of instrumentalism, that is, elites fomenting ethnic conflict in order to advance their own strategic agendas; or, expressed in the theorised terms of the political economy literature on ethnic conflict, grievances (economic marginalisation) operating through structures of entitlements (economic opportunities and the avenues available

[18] A meeting in Golok was reported to me by a local resident there. A similar meeting in Chentsa following the clash in January 2003 was reported to me by a senior official from Malho Prefecture.

for political activism), such that the conditioned incentives facing elites lead them to foment open conflict.[19] However, on closer examination the direct benefits of the boycott to the Tibetan elite are not clear. Some Tibetan business people probably benefited. However, the marginal benefits accrued from the boycott would have been counterbalanced by the damage done to Tibetan-Muslim business networks. For instance, one Muslim schoolteacher in Rongwo Town told me about the regular, although little-spoken, financial relations between wealthy Tibetans and local Muslim business people. Even wealthy monks and lamas from Rongwo Monastery are involved, lending money to local Muslims at interest rates of about eight percent per annum. Furthermore, Tibetan business people are often, themselves, stigmatised and thereby could not, and did not, serve as popular rallying figures. In any case, business people do not appear to have been the primary instigators of the movement.

Members of the secular and religious educated elite, on the other hand, seem to have played primary leadership roles, despite the apparent lack of personal benefits. Most secular intellectuals are rooted in state or para-state sector employment which is generally not threatened by Muslims, yet which could be threatened if their activities were deemed contrary to state interests, as in the case of fomenting nationalism or ethnic conflict. Similarly, intensified competition over public employment in the Tibetan areas largely takes place with Chinese, not Muslims. Religious elites are also more or less immune to economic competition from Muslims and their already tenuous relations with the state would only become further strained if they were associated with politically sensitive activities. Most signs point to the Han Chinese as the main contenders for Tibetan elite rivalry.

Effectively, an instrumental interpretation only offers a partial explanation of these events. This is because a strong normative dimension, framed in terms of Tibeto-Buddhist solidarity, exists within these elite strategies. Ethnic animosity does not necessarily follow a purely economic rational, although certain economic aspects of a larger malaise become symbolic rallying points. These rallying points are those that touch most closely a nerve of dignity, rooted in

[19] I am indebted to David Keen for pointing out to me how this more subtle interpretation of instrumentalism describes quite well my presentation of contemporary Tibetan-Muslim ethnic conflict.

conceptions of hierarchy, and conditioned by a sense of expediency. Muslims receive the brunt of Tibetan animosity because, on one hand, they are upwardly mobile in the economic hierarchy from a lower and stigmatised position and, on the other hand, they are not necessarily mobile in the social or political hierarchy, at least not within the Tibetan areas.[20] Their economic rise comes to symbolise the exclusionary dynamics faced by both common and elite Tibetans within their local economies, while their social position makes it expedient for Tibetans to scapegoat them. Tibetans can construct contemporary histories of conflict with Muslims which draw on potent religious symbols, and this is easy for them to do precisely because of the primordialist nature of Tibetan-Muslim relations.

## LAMAS AND HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF CONFLICT

Even among the Tibetan religious leaders who were opposed to, or abstained from, the boycott, many agreed on the need to take a more competitive stance towards Muslims. Two extensive interviews that I carried out with lamas from different parts of Amdo illustrate this. For the sake of anonymity, they will be referred to as Lamas A and B. Both were middle-aged and had been born within the PRC. Lama B had spent some time in the exile community, returning to Tibet in the 1980s, and had also spent some time in China proper. Both lamas could be considered progressive within their communities.[21] Their positions were broadly representative of most of the educated Tibetans that I interviewed, although they were among the most articulate and balanced in their treatment of the boycott. While neither overtly supported the boycott,[22] they both implicitly supported the larger principles underlying the boycott, explaining their positions through a subtle and skilful circular reasoning that mixed Buddhist discourse with informed interpretations of history, as well as racial stereotypes.

---

[20] For instance, see Yi (2005) on the marginalisation of Muslims from local county politics in Rebgong.

[21] By progressive I refer not only to a generally tolerant attitude towards Muslims, but also to a modern interpretation of religious teachings and to a liberal attitude on the mixing of secular and monastic activities.

[22] I doubt that either of them would have overtly expressed their support in any case, given the extreme sensitivity of the subject. For similar reasons, I was not able to interview any lamas who overtly supported the boycott during my field work.

Both lamas expressed disapproval of the boycott by referring to the Buddhist principles of compassion and tolerance. These require patience and kindness, as well as a compassionate understanding that Muslims are suffering from their own ignorance and delusions if and when they try to harm Tibetans, whether through cheating, serving soiled food, or other acts of animosity. For instance, Lama A reasoned:

> As a Tibetan Buddhist, I practise compassion towards people, and therefore I do not say that the Muslim nationalities are bad. Because my religion is not only about suffering but also about happiness, I try to not harm others and only to help them. Therefore, if I say or do things that hurt others, this is not good. I have this same attitude towards the Muslims, without discriminating against them.

Interestingly, he also drew a comparison between this spiritually-informed attitude and the PRC nationalities policy, in that he argued that all nationalities are meant to be treated equally under Chinese law. Lama B expressed almost identical opinions.

Lama B additionally asserted that Tibetans had nothing to fear from the supposed Muslim beliefs regarding the conversion-inducing consumption of ashes. So long as Buddhist refuge is strong, he argued, magical tricks would have no effect on the faithful. It is interesting to note that he nonetheless asserted that Muslims believe in these practices, which he claimed to have known through his frequent interactions with Muslims. Thus, even among educated and broadly tolerant Tibetan elites, there is a distinct ignorance regarding the practices and beliefs of the Muslim 'other'.

Long term interethnic competition between Tibetans and Muslims was also mentioned. Both lamas portrayed this in terms of the fundamental antagonism that exists between Buddhism and Islam, defined primarily in terms of religious orthopraxy. The subject of killing animals plays a key role. Lama A argued:

> In Buddhism, we always teach not to kill. Therefore, people try not to kill. In Islam, people should kill and therefore Muslims kill a lot of animals. This is not a problem in their religion. Therefore, wherever they are, there are always a lot of problems and people feel insecure.

This argument was repeated to me in an almost identical formulation by a variety of Tibetan officials and lay scholars, suggesting that it is conventional rhetoric in Amdo. It is mostly likely derived from the

religious elite, given that it is argued in terms of Buddhist notions of the 'environmental' karmic repercussions of killing.

Obviously, differentiating Buddhists from Muslims on the basis of the Buddhist proscription of killing turns a blind eye to the fact that the Tibetan economy is largely based on animal husbandry and the Tibetan diet, barley aside, is also largely based on meat and dairy products. Muslim abattoirs thereby play a symbiotic role within Tibetan communities, slaughtering animals as a service for Tibetans. Where Tibetans wish to maintain a distance from the act of slaughter, they will simply sell an animal to a Muslim abattoir and purchase meat in the market from the same or similar butchers.

Furthermore, many Tibetans do slaughter their own animals. It is highly inconvenient and expensive for villagers from more remote villages and pastoral areas to travel back and forth to town, especially during the hot summer months. Tibetans are also fond of blood and their preferred method of slaughter is suffocation (which retains the blood), as compared to the Muslim Halal method of slitting the throat and draining the blood. Both methods are neither instant nor painless. Obviously, karmic considerations do not carry much weight in the preparation of Tibetan blood sausages, enjoyed by lay and ordained alike in often festive circumstances.[23] A similar paradox is played out in the booming trade of caterpillar fungus. While many lamas advise that the digging of the fungus kills the nearly-dead caterpillar and therefore constitutes an act of killing, whole communities of otherwise religious Tibetan nomads avidly engage in the springtime digging. A blind eye is no doubt turned due to the lucrative cash income that it generates for these communities (Winkler forthcoming).

With respect to the slaughter of animals, Tibetans often argue that they only kill animals for their subsistence needs, whereas the Muslims make a business of killing. To some degree, this observation is correct (Fischer 2002: 21–22). Indeed, in several privatisation cases that were reported to me in Amdo, monasteries had attempted (without success) to purchase state-owned abattoirs

[23] On several occasions I visited farming households that had just finished suffocating a goat. The men involved were clearly aware that they were engaged in a negative action and repeatedly expressed their remorse to me. However, the event proceeded in an otherwise festive manner. Such moral self-consciousness would not be observed in a Muslim household and it effectively prevents Tibetans from entering into the commercialisation of meat production.

with the intention of closing them down and simultaneously preventing their purchase by Muslim business people. A similar case was reported by Radio Free Asia in Khardze, involving a Chinese business person (RFA 2006). Furthermore, some lamas and secular scholars have recently argued that if Tibetans continue to eat meat or to sell their animals to butchers they should slaughter the animals themselves. The karmic effect of killing is the same in any case. If Tibetans take the responsibility of killing upon themselves, Muslim abattoirs will not be supported and the commercialisation of meat processing in Amdo will be prevented, thereby conforming to the tacit religious acceptance of killing for need rather than for business.[24] Nevertheless, anti-Muslim sentiment continues to be persuasively framed within this religious moral discourse.

There is also a tendency to portray Muslims as naturally violent. For instance, Lama A suggested that "there is always a feeling that wherever there are Muslims in the world, there are problems and fighting". He cited the examples of Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East to support his case.[25] The same argument was repeated to me on many occasions, by officials and scholars, and even by farmers and high school students. Such Tibetan prejudice towards Muslims is broadly shared with the local Chinese, who also typically characterise the Muslims as naturally violent.

In addition to violence, Muslims are also portrayed as tricky and cheating. A variety of Tibetan students, farmers and nomads cited these characteristics as reasons for the success of Muslims in business, given that this is generally believed to require cheating. Some Tibetan officials, scholars and lamas have been trying to reform this understanding by arguing that business and Buddhism can be practised together harmoniously and that a strong business community is vital to support a strong monastic community (as in Ngawa). Nonetheless, despite these efforts, it appears to be generally accepted that Muslims do cheat in business. Interestingly, Tibetans hold similar prejudices amongst themselves: many Golok Tibetans assert Ngawa Tibetans to be untrustworthy and Tibetans from nomadic areas tend to mistrust those from farming areas.

[24] These arguments were reported to me by several Tibetan scholars from Chabcha and Golok.

[25] He did not correspondingly imply that Americans are naturally violent, despite the fact that they are also involved in each of these conflicts, nor that some of the bloodiest episodes of the twentieth century involved intra-European wars.

The common feeling among Amdo Tibetans is that Muslims will trick you if they can get away with it, so the victims might not even know they are being cheated, making it difficult for them to substantiate their prejudices. For instance, when I asked some high school students from Chentsa County if they had ever been cheated by a Muslim, they said no. When asked to identify Muslim businesses that were based on cheating they referred to the local motorcycle theft rings, but could not identify any legitimate Muslim businesses that were based on cheating. On the other hand, they accepted the fact that Tibetans were also involved in crime rings. Evidence of cheating, therefore, rested either on reference to crime or on the generic examples that have been passed through the grapevine.

Lama A summarized the prejudice succinctly:

> Muslims are very clever. The children, the women, as well as the men are always thinking of doing business. Therefore, they are always in the Tibetan areas trading. The whole focus of the nationality is on making money, not on education, culture and so forth. The Tibetans focus a lot on education, culture, religion and so forth. But [the Muslims] only focus on making money. This is a problem in the Tibetan areas because the Tibetans are always afraid of being cheated by the Muslims.

Herein, Lama A, a leading religious scholar, was remarkably dismissive of local Muslim culture. In particular, his monastery borders Linxia, which has served as a centre for Muslim scholarship in China for centuries, including Sufism from the seventeenth century and scripturalist fundamentalism from the late nineteenth century (Lipman 1997). Ironically, today both Tibetans and Muslims of this region have dismal education standards, among the worst in China (Fischer 2005a: ch 5).

Many of these prejudices are, interestingly, mirrored in Muslim views of Tibetans. For instance, one female Muslim high school student whom I interviewed in Rongwo expressed the opinion that Tibetans are aggressive, noting the tendency of Tibetans to fight collectively.[26] Similarly, one female Muslim high school student from Rongwo interviewed by Yi (2005: 19) explained that Tibetans seem to be the principal enemies of Muslim students because "some Muslims are very pious about their religion and are very honest.

[26] These forms of fighting are commonly observed in the field (Pirie 2005).

Some Tibetans or Han do not like these customs of Muslims…" Ironically, while Tibetans debase Muslim piety as only relating to material gain, Muslims, in turn, perceive that their hard honest work threatens Tibetans.

In terms of the evolution of competition between Tibetans and Muslims, both lamas adopted a similar historical narrative, emphasing the vagrant outsider status of Muslims. Both noted that the Hui (Chinese Muslims) were not included in the Qing classification of nationalities. Lama A said that this was because they were considered to be like animals, not human. Lama B suggested an etymology, referring to the Chinese character of the mouth that is part of the character representing the word 'Hui'; it is as if the Hui are constantly moving, eating wherever they are, and taking away whatever they can with them. They do not belong, because they are always oriented towards a centre that is outside China (Mecca) and to which they eventually intend to return.[27]

Aggressive expansion, particularly into Buddhist areas, was also emphasised. For instance, Lama A explained:

> In history, many countries that were once Buddhist were taken over by Muslims, such as Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India itself, and even places such as Linxia, which was once a big Buddhist centre but is now dominated by Muslims. Therefore, there is a perception that their goal is to move into Buddhist areas and destroy Buddhist culture, and to make them Muslim areas. History confirms this.

Lama B argued along very similar lines, also mentioning other locations such as Iran and Sumatra. In this sense, both were erudite in the Asian history of Buddhism and saw an inherent antagonism between Islam and Buddhism, with Buddhists on the defensive for centuries.

These elite observations are often echoed by a popular anecdote concerning the Muslim who arrives in a Tibetan town as a beggar, then after one year has a shack selling trinkets, and so on, until twenty years later he has bought up the land around him, built a large house, surrounded it with high walls and continues to expand. In this

[27] Both lamas differentiated the Uighurs from the Hui in this regard. Lipman (1997) argues that this stereotyping of the Hui as transient, common throughout China, is misconceived.

manner, an insidious and almost virus-like caricature of Muslim take-over is represented at the local level.

Following this line of reasoning, and despite their opposition to the boycott in its overt aggressive form, both lamas ended up giving very similar instrumental justifications for the boycott, referring to contemporary economic conditions. In relation to my questions on the strength of the boycott in Golok, Lama A reasoned:

> Therefore, why did the events happen in Golok? People were feeling insecure. They produce nothing besides animal products, which they sell to the Muslims, and they buy everything from the Muslims. Therefore, a logical argument arose that if no one buys from the Hui, then the Hui will not get rich or successful, and then they will go away.

Again, Lama B argued in a similar way, highlighting the fact that Muslims are slowly taking over the economy in the Tibetan areas, for instance by purchasing wool, furs and meat, and selling these same products back to Tibetans along with a range of other products. Lama B further believed that the original message of the Ngawa lama had been confused. He said that this lama had been attempting to reform beliefs regarding animal slaughter in light of the changing position of Muslims in the Tibetan areas, arguing that "if you eat meat, then you should kill the animals yourself rather than letting the Muslims do it". According to Lama B, this message became misinterpreted as advocacy for a wholesale boycott of Muslim businesses, following which the movement was taken over by more politically oriented lamas. While he personally did not support the boycott and continued eating in Muslim restaurants, he nonetheless thought that it was good for Tibetans to start thinking about these issues, such as moving into non-traditional economic activities and, in particular, business.

These explanations corresponded with discussions I had with disciples of several prominent lamas in Golok in 2004. Apparently, some of the most senior lamas argued that Tibetans should not support Muslims on purely moral grounds, given the way that Muslims treated animals. They avoided the politicised questions of boycotts, not necessarily because they were opposed to economic activism in principle, but because it was important for a high lama to appear to be above the mundane concerns of politics. However, the moral ground that they provided implicitly condoned the stance of more junior and more politicised lamas, who explicitly connected the

boycott to political economy concerns. In turn, the advice of the activist lamas was “do not fight, but do not give money”.

Nonetheless, despite the Buddhist principle of not fighting, Golok Tibetans (and Amdo Tibetans in general) have not hesitated in the past to rise up in armed resistance against invading Muslim and Chinese armies (and against each other), with the religious leadership playing central mobilising roles. Their pride in this martial heritage is still very much alive, particularly given the fact that older generations today lived through periods of resistance against Ma Bufang in the 1930s and the PLA in the 1950s. In effect, the advice to resist Muslim economic dominance was easily misconstrued if, indeed, it was not a covert signal to take a heavy handed stance towards Muslims, one that the lamas could not advocate explicitly. Covert messages are particularly necessary under current Chinese dominance, given that any open call to conflict would bring immediate retribution from the state, as it did in the case of events in Chentsa.

## CONCLUSION

Despite their non-participation in the boycott, both of the lamas I interviewed articulated a subtle synthesis of past and present Tibetan-Muslim relations, presenting Tibetans as making their last stand against the gradual loss of Buddhist territory to an advancing Muslim take-over. The take-over is portrayed as insidious, having occurred through the slow, and almost imperceptible appropriation of economic levers over time. It is not suggested that Muslim influence could be attributed to charismatic and learned religious leaders who inspired Muslims to organize themselves against discrimination or who converted non-Muslims through spiritual inspiration. Rather, expanding Muslim influence is attributed to sinister stereotypes, particularly the devious Muslim usurping Tibetan wealth through trickery. A particular account of history is constructed and condoned, idealising Tibetan virtues while vilifying Chinese Muslims. While neither lama explicitly supported the more exacerbated forms of anti-Muslim activism, both reproduced a discourse that identified Muslims as invaders and Tibetan-Buddhists as defenders, within a conflictive vision of history, and on this basis they rationalised current events. These two interviews provide an insight into how

educated religious elites have played key roles in articulating a primordial or essentialist view of Tibetan-Muslim conflict.

Both lamas, nevertheless, also provided clues to the instrumental factors behind the conflict, which related to contemporary economic competition. The breakdown of traditional economic hierarchies underlies their contemporary concerns. In the past, so long as land remained the primary source of wealth in the Tibetan areas, the position of the Tibetan nomad or farmer was secure. Muslims were invited to perform stigmatised trades and cultural-religious belief systems supported this division of labour. Modernity in Tibet has fundamentally altered this balance. Both the rise of Muslim economic success and the fact that Tibetans must increasingly compete with Muslims in the same urban economic space fundamentally irks a Tibetan sense of dignity and pride. This leaves them with a challenged sense of agency in the face of contemporary transformations, one which is exacerbated by the iron grip of Chinese rule over any manifestations of ethnic minority nationalism.

Thus, while the primordialist explanation is only a partial one, it helps to refute a purely instrumentalist or constructivist interpretation of the conflict. Because Tibetans and Muslims in Amdo have been coexisting for most of the second millennium, during which time China, in its various manifestations, has held regional dominance, most relationships, whether conflictive or cooperative, are infused with primordialism. Primordial myths are continuously reformulated to suit the purpose of the times. They are neither entirely the result of contemporary experiences, being rooted in long histories of conflict, identity, prejudice and labour segmentation, nor of instrumentalism, in the sense that reactions to changing economic hierarchies are not purely based on the calculated interests of elites. But neither are they entirely primordial, for the nature of contemporary conflicts is new, rooted in a sudden upheaval of society, polity and economy within the space of a few generations.

A processual analysis of social exclusion and social protection thus helps us to go beyond the limited reasoning offered by main stream theories of ethnic conflict. In particular, there is a marked tendency in the political economy literature on ethnic conflict to refute a primordial straw man by deconstructing to oblivion any of the primordialist perceptions of local people themselves involved in conflict. While it is true that the construction of racial stereotypes plays an important ideological role in the political economy of ethnic

conflicts, a more subtle reading of the Tibetan-Muslim case suggests that the history of cultural encounters over centuries provides an essential ground from which to understand the paths that contemporary conflict can take in the face of the major transformations that have affected the Tibetan areas over the course of the twentieth century. The most fundamental transformation can be posited as political (the dominance of the PRC), demographic (population transition, migration and urbanisation) and structural economic (the relative decline of agriculture and the relative rise of trade, industry and services as a sources of wealth). These transformations have undermined the traditional economic dominance of Tibetans in the Tibetan areas and have intensified competition between Tibetans and Muslims.

Within this perspective, interethnic relations can be seen to be shaped and conditioned by defensive responses to exclusion, on the one hand, and strategies of inclusion, on the other, as various groups seek to defend, negotiate or innovate existing and new modes of incorporation into the changing matrices of power. These responses are driven by the impulse for social protection which, in turn, is framed within the discursive and moral notions of dignity and decency. The resultant strategies may be advocated by reference to historically-rooted identities, or else by reference to constructed identities in the modern period. Similarly, motivations may be political and economic, or else they may be morally-based, drawing on ideas of redemption, generosity, retribution, preservation of religion or other ideology. In any particular ethnic relationship, any or all of these various influences may interact. However, the plurality of variables is not the main point; rather, what brings them all together, fuels them and identifies them as modern conflicts, is found in the underlying forces of dislocation and relocation that are unique and fundamental to modern transformations (such as demographic transition and capitalism), which shape the patterns of exclusion and avenues for social protection.

From one perspective, therefore, Tibetans are acting to prevent long term economic marginalisation by attempting to capture old or new Muslim niches in the newly emerging urban economies of the Tibetan areas, or else to negotiate better terms of trade in the rural economies. In the absence of open violence, these strategies are grudgingly tolerated by the state because they are directed towards another minority group. Conversely, the same Tibetan strategies are

not directed towards the Han Chinese given that this would close off the best avenues for social protection, that is, state or private patronage. However, while these concerns for social protection are moulded by the political economy, they are also rooted in a sense of cultural and social dignity, based on indigenous conceptions of local hierarchy and power. Thus, while instrumental strategic considerations can be seen to underlie much of the recent Tibetan-Muslim conflict, its legitimation is grounded in a religious historiography of conflict with Muslims. In other words, the political and economic cannot be isolated from the cultural and social, just as the instrumental cannot be separated from the primordial.

The views expressed by the two reincarnate lamas presented in this paper highlight the important role played by the elite in the formation of Tibetan attitudes and the conformity observed in the interpretation of events across Amdo. Rather than relying on simplistic theories of ethnic conflict, which, under one variation or another, usually implicate elites in manipulating commoners, a processual understanding of exclusion and social protection clarifies the complex and subtle mechanisms whereby elites and commoners find common purpose, mobilising ethnicity across class and other social divides.

## Acknowledgements

The Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics generously provided funding for field research in 2003 and 2004, all of which directly contributed to this chapter. In addition, field research has also been funded by the Central Research Fund of the University of London. General PhD funding has also contributed indirectly to this work, which has been provided by the Québec Government (Fonds québecois de la recherche sur la société et la culture), the UK Government (Overseas Research Student Award), the London School of Economics, and the Canadian Section of Amnesty International.

## References

van Beek, Martin 2000. Beyond Identity Fetishism: Communal Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy. *Cultural Anthropology*, 15(4): 525–69.

Cabezon, José Ignacio 1997. Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere. *In* G. Henry (ed.) *Islam in Tibet and the Illustrated Narrative Tibetan Caravans*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae.

CNN 2003. Tibetans, Muslim Huis clash in China. CNN (23 February 2003).

Fischer, Andrew Martin 2002. *Poverty by Design: The Economics of Discrimination in Tibet*. Montréal: Canada Tibet Committee.

—— 2005a. *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of recent economic growth*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press.

—— 2005b. Close Encounters of an Inner Asian Kind: Tibetan-Muslim co-existence and conflict past and present. *Crisis States Working Paper* (68), London: Crisis States Programme, London School of Economics.

Gladney, Dru 1991. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn 1989. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

—— 1998. Introduction and The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery. *In* M. Goldstein and M. Kapstein (eds), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Ethnic Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goodman, David 2004. Qinghai and the Emergence of The West: Nationalities, communal interaction and national integration. *The China Quarterly*, 178(6): 379–99.

Horlemann, Bianca 2002. Modernisation Efforts in Mgo Log: A chronicle, 1970–2000. *In* T. Huber (ed.) *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and culture in the post-Mao era*. Leiden: Brill.

Lipman, Jonathan 1997. *Familiar Strangers: A history of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Nietupski, Paul 2002. Sino-Tibetan Relations in Eighteenth-Century Labrang. *In* K. Buffetrille and H. Diemberger (eds), *Territory and Identity in Tibet and the Himalayas*. Leiden: Brill.

Pirie, Fernanda 2005. Feuding, Mediation and the Negotiation of Authority among the Nomads of Eastern Tibet. *Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper*, 72, Halle: Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology.

RFA 2006. Tibetan, Blinded, Freed from Jail, Five Still Held for Slaughterhouse Fire. *Radio Free Asia* (2 February 2006).

Tsering Shakya 1999. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A history of modern Tibet since 1947*. London: Pimlico.

Winkler, Dan forthcoming.Yartsa Gunbu (Cordyceps sinensis) and the Fungal Commodification of the Rural Economy in Tibet AR. *Economic Botany*, Special issue on fungi, edited by David Arora.

Yi Lin 2005. Muslim Narratives of Schooling, Social Mobility and Cultural Difference: A Case Study in Multi-ethnic Northwest China. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 6(1): 1–28.

# APPARITIONS OF RED HORSES: NARRATIVES OF DESTRUCTION IN BODONGPA MONASTERIES IN CENTRAL TIBET

JILL SUDBURY

## INTRODUCTION

Within the discourse of the Tibetan pro-independence movement, the widespread destruction of monastic institutions has become emblematic of the Chinese presence in Tibet.[1] To the Chinese state, these 'feudal' institutions epitomised the 'old' Tibet and thus incurred the administration's ire, attitudes which reached a brutal climax during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76.[2] Despite the historic significance of this period, there has been noticeably little written about the violence that overwhelmed Tibet during these years. In part this reflects the extreme discomfiture that this era evokes amongst Tibetans. Although they generally assert that the destruction was wrought by 'the Chinese', what is almost never referred to is that much was carried out by Tibetans themselves, albeit under varying degrees of coercion.[3] However, whilst the traumas of this period are rarely spoken of, they are certainly not forgotten, especially as the protagonists and their families are often still living within the same communities. Patrick French (2003: 200) quotes a Tibetan who, as a young Red Guard in 1966, had been involved in the desecration of the Jokhang temple, one of the most important shrines in the Tibetan Buddhist world: "It was the Chinese

[1] The official website for the Tibetan government-in-exile states that by 1976, out of a total of 6,259 monasteries and nunneries that had existed in Tibet in 1959, only about eight remained unscathed (www.tibet.com/WhitePaper/white7.html).

[2] The Cultural Revolution is generally seen as having ceased in 1976, with the death of Mao and the arrests of the Gang of Four, although Mao himself had declared it to be over by 1969.

[3] Why Tibetans turned on their own monasteries remains a most complex and painful question. For a thought-provoking perspective from a Chinese historian with an interest in Tibet see Wang Lixiong (2002) and Tsering Shakya's response (2002).

who killed the sheep, but we were the ones who skinned and gutted it."

The failure of the Lhasa Uprising in March 1959 and the subsequent flight into exile of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama marked a watershed in Sino-Tibetan relations.[4] This paper examines the legacies of this period from the perspective of those living around a handful of surviving monasteries belonging to the small Bodongpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Whilst I was conducting fieldwork in Tibet on the revival of this tradition, it was necessary to discuss the monastery's circumstances before 1959 and its subsequent destruction. It quickly became clear to me that the way in which the monastery had been destroyed continued to have serious ramifications for the course of its reconstruction, which in all cases was still taking place. In the often deeply painful and awkward conversations that I had with the monks, a notable narrative structure emerged. This drew heavily on a Buddhist model of order and *karmic* consequence to not only describe past events, but also to express the complex emotions that many still felt for those within their own communities who had been involved in these acts of destruction.

## THE TARGETING OF MONASTERIES

On 23 March 1959 the red flag of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was hoisted above the Potala, signalling the end of the Lhasa Uprising. To the incoming communist ideologues, the monastic institutions were one of the three 'evils' of the 'old' society and thus a target of the nascent regime's attention.[5] They were also singled out for being at the heart of rebellions that had been costly to the regime's advance, particularly the Khampa revolt in eastern Tibet, which was finally suppressed in 1957–58,[6] and the Lhasa Uprising.

[4] See Tsering Shakya (1999: 237–75) for a comprehensive account of the rapidly changing events of this time.

[5] The other two 'evils' were the aristocratic estate-holders and the Tibetan Government (Shakya 1999: 248).

[6] This had resulted in large numbers of Khampa refugees flooding into Central Tibet. Thousands took refuge in Lhasa, where they received considerable support from the monasteries there. These would later be severely punished by the PLA for providing assistance (Tsering Shakya 1999: 155, 253). At the Bodongpa monastery of Pelmo Choeding, far to the west, older members of the community recalled that

Within months of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) establishing control, monasteries were forced to relinquish their estates, thus eliminating the support base for substantial numbers of monks. At remote, rural monasteries such as the Bodongpa monastery of Pelmo Choeding,[7] far from the politicised centres of power, old monks recalled that they were 'sent home' and the monasteries locked up.[8] Soon after, in 1960, monastic estates were redistributed. According to the Tibetan historian, Tsering Shakya, "The dissolution of the economic power base of the monasteries was the most significant social and political event in the history of Tibet since the introduction of Buddhism." (1999: 254)

Whilst the Cultural Revolution has come to be particularly associated with the destruction of monasteries, at the revolution's onset in 1966 they were already greatly depleted. In Kham and Amdo, to the east, the widespread looting and ransacking of monasteries had begun as early as 1956 (Smith 1996: 474).[9] From the outset of the Chinese annexation, monasteries had been plundered for both food stocks and valuables. Metal statues were melted down in vast quantities, in particular to fuel the Great Leap Forward (1958–61), although this activity continued well into the 1970s.[10] Written in 1962, the Tenth Panchen Lama's famous

---

Khampa refugees en route to Nepal were a major source of news of events to the east.

[7] Within the main body of this paper I have transcribed Tibetan words phonetically and supplemented this, where appropriate, by the Tibetan spellings in the footnotes.

[8] In the monasteries in this study the older monks reported that being a monk *per se* had not singled them out for particular attention. Indeed the majority of monks were judged by the state to be in a similar position to serfs, with the more vituperative attacks being reserved for the monastic elite.

[9] In eastern Tibet, the Red Army first inflicted damage as early as 1934-35 (Smith 1996: 339).

[10] See particularly Smith (1996: 474–75, f/n 71) on the melting down of statues. The official website of the Tibetan government-in-exile quotes a Chinese informant in Beijing:

> [M]ost of the Tibetan cultural artifacts carted to China were destroyed. The statues and ritual objects of pure gold and silver were never seen again. Those of gilded copper, bell-metal, red copper, brass, etc, were ferried to Luyun, from where they were eventually sold to foundries in Shanghai, Sichuan, Tai Yun, Beijing, Tianjin, etc. The foundry called Xi-you Qing-shu Tie (precious metal foundry) situated about five kilometers to the east of Beijing city, alone purchased about 600 tons of Tibetan crafted metals.

'Seventy-thousand Character Petition' details the considerable destruction already suffered by monasteries in the TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) by that date.[11]

Ideologically, the period after 1959 also witnessed marked shifts in how the Chinese administration handled what it saw as the Tibetan issue. Throughout the 1950s Chinese officials had negotiated primarily with the traditional ruling classes, leaving unchallenged the assumptions of ordinary Tibetans that politics was the prerogative of the elite. Keenly aware that any changes had, thus far, been achieved by coercion rather than through any substantive change in attitudes, from 1959 to 1964 the emphasis changed, with great efforts being made to engage the Tibetan masses in the political process (Tsering Shakya 1999: 240).[12] This dual focus on both monastic institutions and the need to 'involve' the masses was to have a catastrophic impact on Tibetan religious sites.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Cultural Revolution heralded a new type of campaign across the PRC. Whereas previously the regime had aimed to change the *structure* of society, the Cultural Revolution aimed to fundamentally alter the *minds* of its citizens, moulding a new, socialist consciousness (Tsering Shakya 1999: 316). The distinction was made between the possessors of 'green brains' who clung to the old, traditional ways, and those with progressive 'white brains' who could be ideologically transformed by Mao Zedong's teachings as expressed in the *Thoughts of Chairman Mao*. In Tibet, such a transition would not be so straightforward. As Shakya notes:

---

(http://www.tibet.com/WhitePaper/white7.html)

[11] For a full translation of the 'Seventy-thousand Character Petition', see Bskal bzan tshe brthan (Tenth Panchen Lama) (1997). As Shakya points out, this referred just to the monasteries in the TAR, and not in other Tibetan districts where the damage was probably greater due to factors such as the suppression of the Khampa rebellion (2002: 43).

[12] There was a parallel shift from an emphasis that Tibet was an inalienable part of China, to an assertion that the development of Tibet was unattainable without the Chinese presence (Tsering Shakya 1999: 246). In many respects, these policies heralded a marked decline in the autonomy of the region, an irony that was compounded by the formation of the Tibet Autonomous Region in 1965.

> In China this question was reduced to the dichotomy between the old and new, tradition and modernity, capitalist and socialist cultural outlooks. In Tibet, however, there was the further complication of the natural and insurmountable division between the Tibetans and the Chinese. To the majority of Tibetans, 'the new' was associated with the Chinese. The authorities were aware of this contradiction: they emphasised that the issue was no longer one of China and Tibet and stressed that the question in Tibet was between the old and the new. The recently coined terms 'Chitsog Serpa' (the new society) and 'Chitsog Nyinpa' (the old society) became key words of Chinese rule. The Cultural Revolution was then seen as the final battle before the coming of the new society. (1999: 316–17)

During the period of state-sanctioned chaos that ensued, the recently colonised Tibetans were required to demonstrate to their new masters their fervour in transforming reactionary 'green brains' into 'white brains', resulting in Tibetans being pitted against Tibetans. The youth, in particular, were actively targeted by propaganda campaigns, with the ranks of the Red Guards being swollen by schoolchildren,[13] as well as young, idealistic Tibetans.[14] Whilst undoubtedly a time of bewildering change and great fear, the Cultural Revolution also offered the possibility of reinvention. The state's redivision of society according to background offered unheard-of opportunities to those from more lowly origins, whilst those from 'bad' backgrounds had to find ways to curry favour with their new leaders. The line between coercion and collaboration was often fine indeed.

Although the physical destruction of the Cultural Revolution was clearly visible, the social consequences remained more opaque. A

---

[13] Schoolchildren were vigorously recruited. A large number from the Lhasa Middle School, for example, were involved in the destruction of the Jokhang (French 2003). This school, along with the Tibet Teacher Training College, were the first to establish Red Guard movements in Lhasa in August 1966 (Tsering Shakya 1999: 320).

[14] The necessity for modernisation had been acknowledged by many Tibetans, including both the previous and current Dalai Lamas. How this should be accomplished was hotly debated by Tibetan intellectuals, and in these rarefied circles some were attracted to the ideals of the Communist Party. The autobiography of Tashi Tsering (Goldstein et al. 1997) and the biography of Bapa Phüntso Wangye (Goldstein et al. 2004) provide useful insights into this period, the latter having been the highest-ranking Tibetan in the Communist Party during the 1950s. Despite their socialist ideals, however, both men were imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution, and subsequently rehabilitated.

particular characteristic of the Cultural Revolution was its often bizarre disorder. Spence (1999) has characterised Mao as a 'lord of misrule' who actively enjoyed promoting instability and disorder, frequently enforced by random cruelties coupled with appalling privations. With 'revolutionary' activity absolving responsibility, the proletariat (often in the form of juvenile Red Guards) turned on the newly-constituted state. Into this explosive admixture was added revenge for all manner of perceived 'faults', ranging from pre-1959 social positions and the failure of earlier political movements, through to personal and familial grudges. Revenge was often public and dramatic, exemplified by the public *thamzing* or 'struggle sessions'.[15] However, those who chose, or were chosen, to spearhead these attempts to impose a new social order often suffered devastating consequences. In Tibet, as will be seen, the subsequent 'retribution' often took a very characteristically Tibetan form.

## The Physical Destruction of Monasteries

The commencement of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 heralded the systematic *physical* destruction of monasteries. By 1970, this undertaking was largely complete (Tsering Shakya 1999: 348).[16]

Destruction took a number of forms including:

- Razing—particularly of monasteries that were especially symbolic and/or whose occupants had been particularly vociferous in their opposition, for example, Ganden.[17]
- Dismantling—whereby the monastery was deconstructed and the materials used to build new structures. In these instances, the laity was often forced to build domestic dwellings on the site of the monastery.
- Redeployment—particularly as communal granaries or store-rooms, with relatively minor modifications taking place to

[15] Amongst the most infamous episodes from this period were the struggle sessions of the Panchen Lama following his presentation to the Central Committee of his 'Seventy-thousand Character Petition' (Tsering Shakya 1999: 290-301).

[16] Of course, it is also important to remember that not all destruction can be ascribed to the Chinese, with some considerably predating the Chinese annexation. At the Bodongpa monastery of Pelmo Choeding, for example, some of the destruction could be attributed to the Gurkha invasion of 1788.

[17] Ganden monastery was infamously used as target practice by the Chinese air force.

the structure. However, the contents would be removed and religious paintings often defaced.[18]

- Abandonment.

Whereas the razing of monasteries was usually carried out within a small, dramatic timeframe, sometimes as little as hours, much of the destruction fell into the latter categories and generally involved a more gradual dissolution of a monastery's fabric. A monastery's fate often depended on the persuasive powers of the local community, with redeployment generally considered the most desirable of an odious set of options. In these circumstances, cooperating with the authorities was not automatically considered to be disloyal and, as will be seen, the perceived courage and motivation of local leaders during this period has affected how they are subsequently regarded within their communities. The eventual method used has also had considerable consequences for the communities now rebuilding their monasteries.

## THE BODONGPA TRADITION

The Bodongpa tradition is one of a number of small traditions falling outside the four main classifications of Tibetan Buddhism. It was founded by Bodong Chogle Namgyal[19] (1376–1451), who is now principally known for being Tibet's most prolific author, his magnus opus, *The Compendium of Emptiness*,[20] running to 135 volumes. Initially it was a tradition of some influence, with numerous monasteries in an area stretching from Yamdrok Tso all the way to Mt Kailash in the west, and extending south into Dolpo and Mustang in what is now Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. However, for a number of reasons the tradition fell into a rapid decline. By 1959, it was largely moribund, with only a handful of monasteries remaining, primarily in south central Tibet. The most famous was Samding monastery, close to Yamdrok Tso, the seat of the Samding Dorje Phagmo, one of the most senior female incarnates in Tibet.

---

[18] If statues or mural paintings could not be entirely destroyed, typically the faces and hands were gouged out or severed.

[19] Tib. *bo dong phyogs las rnam rgyal.*

[20] Tib. *dpal de kho na nyid 'dus pa.*

As the tradition declined, its philosophical distinctiveness was gradually eclipsed by the importance of its protector deity (*chökyong*),[21] Tashi Ombar, and his manifestations. Indeed, within Tibet the Bodongpas generally define Tashi Ombar as the single most important distinguishing feature of their tradition, operating as the main protector for the Bodongpa tradition on both territorial and sectarian levels.[22] He has a number of manifestations, ranging from the benign to the extremely wrathful. In his most benevolent form, eponymously known as Tashi Ombar, he is depicted as a horseman with a face white as a conch, wearing scarlet robes and headgear, with a lance in his right hand and a flaming jewel in his left, and sitting astride his steed, Lungta Ngönpo, the 'Blue Windhorse'. At his most wrathful, he manifests as Dorje Gyantsan, also referred to as Nochin Dorje Gyantsan. Wearing the distinctive warrior's helmet with pennants attached and on his mount, Phurbu Ragpa, the 'Russet Dagger', he rides through a lake of blood dragging the bound corpse of a malefactor behind him. This iconography is well known to monks and laity alike through wall paintings, statues and the monastic masked dances (*cham*).

## THE DESTRUCTION OF BODONG E

Bodong E monastery,[23] the oldest of the Bodongpa monasteries, is situated equidistant from Lhatse and Shigatse, in south central Tibet. Its demolition, with one unusual caveat, was typical of the destruction of many monasteries. Established in 1049, it is from this monastery that the tradition takes its name.[24] Bodong Chogle Namgyal received much of his early training here and was the abbot for some years. The ruins bear testament to a once substantial and elegantly proportioned monastic complex. Built to a mandalic

---

[21] The importance given to protector deities is a distinctive feature of Tibet religious practice. An enormously varied pantheon is invoked, each with particular territories and jurisdictions, and including protectors of religious law (Tib. *chos skyong*), guardians (Tib. *srung ma*), and the defenders of specific territories (Tib. *yul lha*).

[22] See Hazod (1998) for discussion of the origins of Tashi Ombar (Tib. *bkra shis 'od 'bar*).

[23] Tib. *bo dong ae*

[24] The monastery was founded by Geshe Mudra Chenpo, about whom little is known.

template, the central assembly hall had been surrounded by four high walls facing the cardinal directions, each with a central gate.[25] A broad avenue shaded by a double row of trees had encircled the entire complex. The roof of the main temple was covered with distinctive, turquoise-coloured ceramic tiles. Ironically, whilst this now provides the village with its new name, Yuthog—literally 'turquoise roof'—the monastery now possesses just a solitary tile from the old structure.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, it had been decreed that the main buildings should be converted into storerooms, and thus the fabric of the monastery was to survive the Revolution's worst purges relatively unscathed. The monks could not recall that any particular representations had been made to attain this outcome, rather this was simply a decision that had been made. Some valuables, particularly metal statues, were removed. The remaining contents were placed in storerooms within the monastery, which were then sealed off, with a former monk appointed as manager to oversee the requisitioned site. On the periphery of the monastic complex, the massive walls were soon breached and families were instructed to move in, using the materials of the outer monastic buildings and walls to begin building a new, collectivised future.

At considerable personal risk, a few monks and their families concealed a small number of texts and ritual items that they had been able to salvage.[26] Some of these were hidden, often in the gaps between stones surrounding kitchen hearths or in walls. Other items were buried, a solution which has considerable resonances in Tibet.[27] However, not all those involved were able to withstand the unrelenting fear and pressure. One family succumbed and confessed to concealing prohibited items. The retribution meted out to the

---

[25] The monks recalled that the monastery had been beautifully decorated by Nepali artists, "just like Zhalu". Founded in 1027 a few kilometres from Shigatse, the monastery of Zhalu had been famous throughout the region for its murals. The monastery survived the Cultural Revolution, albeit badly damaged, and has now been substantially restored.

[26] The consequences of these actions have been that a substantial proportion of extant Bodongpa ritual texts are from Bodong E.

[27] *Terma*, or 'hidden treasure', are key teachings secreted for future discovery at more auspicious times. The majority of *terma* teachings are tantric in nature, although there are notable exceptions. Tulku Thundop Rinpoche (1986) provides a useful overview of the *terma* tradition. See Germano (1998) on the role of *terma* in contemporary religious revival in Tibet.

entire community was swift and terrible. Houses were searched in minute detail and many vicious beatings were imposed.[28] When asked how severe the beatings were, an old monk replied tersely, “You died”.

When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the monks assumed that their monastery had escaped lightly. The Eleventh Party Plenum, held in Beijing in 1978, heralded a major shift in state attitudes towards religion. The older monks recalled that the news gradually filtered through that the sacred Jokhang temple in Lhasa had reopened and that major monasteries such as Drepung were beginning to be rebuilt. At Bodong E this optimism was to change dramatically in 1978 (some recalled as late as 1979) when it was decreed that a new granary was to be built in the neighbouring village of Momo Dzong, a few kilometres distant. The local authorities were amenable to it being built from new materials. However, a local work unit, full of revolutionary zeal, insisted that the monastery’s central buildings be dismantled to provide timbers for the new construction (timber being a particularly scarce resource in much of Tibet). Many in the community fiercely contested this decision. Eventually a work team from a nearby village decided to take matters into their own hands and to remove the timbers themselves, thus destroying the building.[29] The bulk of this task was accomplished overnight. A monk, who had been a young child at the time, recalled that many trucks had come the following day to remove the objects that had been sealed away years earlier. Scriptures had just been scattered to the winds. They had covered the ground “like snow”, he remembered, but no-one had dared touch them.

Disease and misfortune rapidly followed for those involved in the destruction. The fate of the leader of the work unit, however, was the worst. He was to die an untimely and dreadful death, described by the monks as “the worst death in the world”. Its inauspicious nature

---

[28] Smith (1996: 484–86) notes the enormous mental strain during this period of ‘thought reform’, exacerbated by the fear of physical violence and death in tandem with the promises of pardon if sufficient ‘reform’ was achieved.

[29] Whilst instances of monasteries being destroyed after the Cultural Revolution are relatively rare, conversations with a number of older Tibetans confirmed that the circumstances that led to the destruction of Bodong E were by no means unique. By this stage, they explained, there had been sustained propaganda campaigns for nearly two decades, to which the younger generation, without exposure to religion, were perceived to have been particularly susceptible.

was further demonstrated by the refusal of the vultures to consume his corpse at the ‘sky burial’, the ritual Tibetan practice of dismembering a body, grinding and mixing various parts with parched barley flour and feeding it to the vultures. It is very rare for vultures not to eat a body, suggesting extreme toxicity, often indicative of poisoning. However, this possibility was never mentioned in any conversations that I had regarding this event. In the end, his body had been unceremoniously thrown into the river.

## CONSEQUENCES OF DESTRUCTION

The graceful and spacious layout of the original monastery has now been completely obliterated, replaced by a village that appears particularly haphazard and ramshackle. Likewise, the rebuilt monastic complex also appears disordered. Somewhat incongruously the monastery’s central assembly hall is situated approximately 100 metres from the *gonkhang*, the shrine of the protector deities, seperated by several houses. On the opposite side of the *gonkhang’s* courtyard the young monks live in small cells, whereas the old monks all live with their natal families in the village. Ruined houses and vacant land surround the two rebuilt monastic buildings, with parts of the original perimeter walls having been incorporated into household structures. Remnants of more recently built commune walls and other such structures bear testimony to the various reform programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. The grand avenue of trees that had once encircled the monastery was felled in the 1970s, with the occasional discarded tree trunk or a stunted specimen now poking through a household’s courtyard.

The decisions made during the early years of the Chinese annexation, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution, including the resettlement of laity on monastic sites, have resulted in a similar form of spatial disorder throughout Tibet, particularly where the traditional physical and symbolic separation of the monastic and lay communities has been jarred. The reasons for this are complex. A significant aspect is the ritual pollution associated with biological reproduction, which characterises the life of the laity, and the commensurate purity associated with monastic celibacy.[30] In

[30] See, in particular, Mills (2003: 206–32) on this issue.

the period of liberalisation that followed in the 1980s, communities across Tibet strove to reverse this disorder. A notable feature of this pan-Tibetan phenomenon has been that wherever possible, monasteries have been reconstructed on the exact site of the previous structures, often incorporating the original foundations and any surviving substructure, even if, superficially at least, it would appear to be cheaper and more convenient to build afresh on a new site.[31] Materials taken from the monasteries, including timber, furniture and even stones, have also been returned in significant quantities. This response has been replicated throughout Tibet. Thus, Bodong E's shambolic appearance reflects the pragmatic consequences of the community's attempts to rebuild the monastery on its original site, using original materials, complicated by the strictures of poverty and bureaucracy; it represents, specifically, the desire to correct the disorder of the Cultural Revolution by replicating the original, pre-1959 order.

This sense of order and the spatial separation of lay and monastic spaces is further reinforced by a strongly held belief that it is inauspicious for the laity to reside on formerly monastic land. As a consequence, as soon as the families residing on such land are in the financial position to relocate, they usually do so. At Bodong E, when I was conducting fieldwork in 2003–04, a number of large farmhouses had recently been built on the perimeter of the village to house families that had previously resided on the site of the monastery, with several more under construction.[32] As families moved out, the land had remained vacant in anticipation of new monastic construction, reflecting the hiatus between the laity's desire to remove themselves and the monastery's financial inability to fill the vacuum. The abandoned buildings were generally left untouched, it being communally acknowledged that at some time in the future when the monastery can be further expanded they will provide a source of building materials, reversing the effects of the earlier dismantling of the monastery for domestic construction. An exception was an open tract of land close to the *gonkhang*, which

[31] Despite the state controlling every aspect of the rebuilding process, such decisions appear to be rarely challenged.

[32] In 2004, a large house cost approximately 10,000 *yuan* to construct. At that time, the monthly salary of a teacher, for example, was around 2,300 *yuan*. However, unless a family member was employed by the government, most villagers were largely on non-monetary subsistence incomes.

was gradually being cleared and levelled in preparation for the construction of a *chamra*, the dancing space for the monastic masked dances (*cham*). However, not all families were wealthy enough to move and the monastery was too poor to assist them—relocation costs for a modest household were 3–5,000 *yuan* per household in 2004.[33]

The re-establishment of the external monastic space is considered a corollary, indeed a prerequisite, to the successful re-establishment of internal order prescribed in the *vinaya*, the monastic disciplinary code. One of the notable features of the current Bodongpa revival has been an increased emphasis on the *vinaya*, especially remarkable considering that before 1959 many of the monasteries had been non-celibate,[34] and the tradition had a reputation for monastic laxity, albeit not always deserved. The reputation and perceived efficacy of the monks' ritual practices is in part dependent on their discipline and sexual continence. The revival of monasteries—both the physical structure and the practices of their inhabitants—was, therefore, seen to benefit the community as a whole. For example, the villagers local to the Bodongpa monastery of Chulho Gonpa Phuk reported that the reconstruction of the monastery in the mid-1980s had heralded better crops and a decrease in illness in the village, benefits that had later increased exponentially when the *cham* had been revived in the early 1990s.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF PELMO CHOEDING

One of the principal seats of the Bodongpa tradition is the monastery of Pelmo Choeding,[35] located in Porong, a nomadic area due north of

[33] At the Bodongpa monastery of Pelmo Choeding, the monks were not only attempting to purchase key buildings that were then occupied by the laity, but were particularly keen to repossess the properties built on the slopes immediately *above* the rebuilt monastery, thus gradually reordering the site so that the laity were not situated higher than the central monastic buildings, reinforcing the *vertical* hierarchy of sanctity and order.

[34] A number of Bodongpa monasteries had been *serkhyimpa*, literally, 'the yellow householders,' a form of non-celibate monk. Within Tibet, there had been a wide range of constructions of monasticism and religious practice, often dependent on pragmatic considerations and/or the tantric practices of the adherents, which may include sexual yogas. Regarding non-celibate monastic communities, see Aziz (1978), Ramble (1984) and Sihlé (2001).

[35] Tib. *dpal mo chos sdings*

Mt Shishapangma close to the Nepalese border. Built in the early part of the fifteenth century by Bodong Chogle Namgyal himself, with the patronage of the king of Gungthang, it had been his main seat for nearly five decades until his death in 1451. Out of the demise of Gungthang kingdom the semi-independent territory of Porong had arisen, ruled by a hereditary ruler, the Jewön. According to genealogies, the abbotship of Pelmo Choeding was filled by the Jewön's brother, generally the eldest.

In the immediate period after the arrival of the Chinese forces in 1959, the monks were ordered to return to their families, and for the next few years the monastery was managed by a couple of local families and several ex-monks. The beginning of the Cultural Revolution, however, heralded much harsher times. Whilst the precise chronology of events involved in the destruction of Pelmo Choeding is uncertain, there would seem to have been two waves of destruction.[36] A local man, Tsepan, was held responsible for the first phase of destruction and Phuntsok, a native of Shigatse, for the second.

The Cultural Revolution marked the beginning of an intense drive to collectivise. In nomadic areas, this involved the construction of fixed abodes in an attempt to settle nomads, with monasteries being a common source of building materials in resource-strapped areas. It also involved the selection of new village leaders with the correct class background. At Pelmo Choeding, Tsepan, a poor local nomad, fulfilled this criterion. The community hoped that by converting the monastery into storerooms at least part of it could be preserved. Tsepan, however, was apparently ferocious in his opposition to this. Under his leadership several local families were ordered to take wood and stones from the monastery and construct permanent residences on the site.

These orders had caused great alarm amongst those concerned. That there would be *karmic* consequences at some point in the future was understood, but not to follow the regime's orders would have had immediate consequences, such as beatings so severe that the

[36] Most of those I interviewed indicated very little awareness of dates, and it was often not clear whether these events had occurred before, during or after the Cultural Revolution. It is also possible that within the current fragile political climate this reticence may reflect the fact that it is permitted to talk about the destruction during the period 1966–76, so actions may be ascribed to this period that had actually taken place at other times.

victims sometimes died of their injuries. However, the monks recalled, the *karmic* consequences were sometimes even swifter than those of the regime, as illnesses befell many of those involved: one man died within days and many suffered from heart and skin disorders. When the monastery was rebuilt two decades later, villagers had returned wood and stones to the monastery in order to avert further *karmic* consequences, a gesture repeated many times across Tibet. Sometimes families were motivated by a sequence of negative events, such as persistent illness, interpreted as bad *karma* that had accrued due to the possession of such items, and families often reported an immediate improvement in their circumstances after these items had been surrendered.

The subsequent fates of Tsepan and Phuntsok are still remembered. Phuntsok's role in the destruction of Pelmo Choeding is less clear, but it seems that he oversaw a difficult latter period when the regime's quests intensified. Not very much is known about his background either, coming as he did from distant Shigatse. However, what was known was that he committed suicide. Rumours circulated as to the exact circumstances; one version had it that he had hung himself in a toilet whilst attending a meeting in Beijing, and another that he had cut his own throat.

Tsepan's fate, however, is well known within the community. In his last years he had been blighted by illness, both physical and mental, and haunted by bad dreams and apparitions. Villagers would sometimes see him standing on the roof of his house, gesticulating and shouting at invisible antagonists. They also knew that he was being plagued by a recurring dream involving horses. Initially he had seen a grey horse but subsequently the horses were always red. He not only dreamt about them, but apparently saw the apparitions of a red horse numerous times, often in broad daylight. To both Tsepan himself and the villagers there was only one interpretation: this was Phurbu Ragpa (the 'Russet Dagger'), the mount of the most wrathful manifestation of Tashi Ombar, Dorje Gyantshan.

In his final years, Tsepan wrote letters to the authorities, begging them to consent to the rebuilding of Pelmo Choeding. He died in around 1986, approximately a year before permission was finally granted. The monks said that his death had not been a good one because of his highly disturbed state of mind, which would preclude a good rebirth.

Tsepan's memory is reviled to this day. He had married a woman from the village and they had had four daughters but no sons, in itself considered inauspicious. His elderly widow still lived in Pelmo Choeding during my fieldwork with two of their unmarried daughters (the other two daughters had married out of the area). People are polite to her face, according to the monks, but are nasty behind her back. "This is the way it usually is," they shrugged in a matter-of-fact way.

In villages where the perpetrators still live alongside those who they denounced, or in the vicinity of the religious sites that they destroyed, such silence is commonplace, but loaded. This would appear to be particularly the case in rural areas, an experience that is shared by similar Chinese communities. Jing observes:

> A notable characteristic of the Maoist campaigns that ravaged the Chinese countryside was the close link between political victims and their tormentors ... What the political campaigns did was to unlock a Pandora's box, pushing the local agents of the state into the hunt for concrete targets at the grassroots levels in pursuit of the 'perpetual revolution' envisioned by Mao. (1996: 87)

Whereas urban dwellers can seek the anonymity of large cities, in the post-Cultural Revolution period, poverty and bureaucratic obstacles make moving away from the 'source' of painful memories almost impossible (ibid: 87–88).

At Pelmo Choeding, Tsepan's sudden assumption of power was a direct result of the policies being implemented by central government throughout China, which saw a decisive shift in leadership from the intellectuals to the proletariat. In Tibet, special directives were issued to increase local involvement in the grassroots implementation of such policies. This need to engage the proletariat led to the rapid promotion of those deemed to fulfil the new criteria of class worthiness, often from poor and uneducated backgrounds. Tsepan personified this shift. In Porong, however, considering that the Jewön had had semi-divine status, Tsepan's appointment had represented social disorder. Indeed, it was believed that the continuance of the Jewön's hereditary lineage was inextricably linked with the well-being of Tibet and that should it be broken, as it had been by the lack of a male heir in the period immediately before 1959, disaster would inevitably follow.

It should be noted that not all village leaders from this period are reviled. Some have remained an integral part of their community,

being judged to have demonstrated courage and skill in defending the best interests of their communities during a bewildering and contradictory time. For example, close to Pelmo Choeding is the Bonpo monastery of Laphuk. The leader at that time, Norbu Thondup, known locally as Nordup, had been very kind, people explained, and the community had remained united. Nordup had lobbied hard for the monastery to be converted into a communal grain store, which resulted in relatively limited damage being done to the overall structure of the monastery and, in particular, to the very fine mural paintings. Interestingly, Nordup's praises are sung by both the Laphuk community and the Buddhists of Pelmo Choeding, communities between which there has been ongoing enmity, albeit over pastoral boundaries rather than religion.

Several decades later, the monks' recounting of these events was striking for their unembarrassed loathing of the protagonists. There were no noticeable intergenerational differences either, with young monks relating these narratives of destruction and retribution in an almost identical manner to their elders and equally vociferous in their contempt. For example, monks only conceded with the greatest of difficulty that Tsepan's unwillingness to defend the monastery may have been born out of fear of being seen to be weak by the new rulers. Such attitudes, certainly to outsiders, sit uncomfortably with Buddhist notions of compassion of which monks are meant to be exemplars—a 'good' Buddhist should use these experiences as an opportunity to practise compassion and appreciation of the impermanence of all things.[37] But, as the case of Pelmo Choeding illustrates, this anger has been legitimised through the metaphor of *karmic* retribution and the wrathful presence of Tashi Ombar. Such a narrative has become the socially acceptable vehicle for relating events of this period, as well as one that also negates the government's version of events.

[37] The Dalai Lama, for example, has frequently said that Mao was his greatest teacher. Others are more willing to admit their difficulties in overcoming animosity. As Palden Gyatso, a well-known former political prisoner and monk, admitted, "This feeling of revenge ran contrary to my religious upbringing, but it is a powerful human impulse" (1997: 126).

## NARRATIVES OF DESTRUCTION: AN ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE

The narratives of destruction from Bodong E and Pelmo Choeding were typical of this genre. Such narratives were characterised by the swiftness of *karmic* retribution meted out to those guilty of desecration or cowardly leadership, for example, often leading to premature and inauspicious deaths. References to heart and circulatory problems, skin diseases and mental illness were also frequent, invariably interpreted by informants to be the direct result of violating the protectors through such actions as destroying shrines and not performing rituals. Skin diseases, in particular, are associated with polluting the *lu*, serpentine deities that reside in the ground, particularly in water sources.[38] Disorders pertaining to an imbalance of *lung* (wind), one of the humours of Tibetan medicine, are often associated with heart complaints and madness. Janes (1999) has noted the raised statistical prevalence of these complaints amongst Tibetan officials in Lhasa working for the state. As Gutschow observes in her study of *lung* imbalances and concomitant mental illness in Zanskar:

> Mental illness serves as a strategic site for drawing the boundaries between order and disorder and considering the overlap of the medical and moral realms. [In the Zanskari idiom], the medical and moral are intimately intertwined. (1997: 177)

Such is the ubiquity of these narratives in explaining the fate of those who participated in the destruction of religious sites, that the apparent absence of such consequences is regarded quizzically. An example of such disbelief occurred during a visit to a monastery (which must remain nameless) when I enquired about its fortunes during the Cultural Revolution. The monastery's elderly cook was summoned to recount the story of its destruction. When asked about the fate of the main protagonists, he stated unequivocally that nothing untoward had happened to them. Later, both my lay research assistant and a visiting monk expressed total disbelief, saying that they were convinced he was lying and that it was simply impossible for there not to have been consequences. Such responses were commonplace, often accompanied by the rejoinder that they would definitely pay the price in future rebirths.

---

[38] See also Bassini (2007), who explores the incidence of 'heart distress' (Tib. *snying nad*) amongst Tibetans in Amdo.

Describing the Mongolian experience during the worst episodes of the Soviet regime, Caroline Humphrey writes that this epoch "cannot accurately be described merely as a 'social transformation' ... but was more like a strange apocalypse, in which ordinary people were stunned but nevertheless had to go on living" (1992: 380). This, too, aptly describes the Tibetan experience. In their retelling, these narratives present a recognisable Buddhist interpretation of events that otherwise remain incomprehensible.

They also provide an alternative narrative to the state-sanctioned view of this period, which could be interpreted as a form of resistance to the colonial presence.[39] As James Scott has noted:

> Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. (1990: xii)

The feelings of enmity and distrust towards the Chinese state have not dissipated, and are now deeply embedded in the communal experience of being Tibetan in contemporary China. These feelings often seek expression through the continuing rejection of both the state's current policies and its versions of historical events. Frequently these sentiments are articulated through the use of space, especially religious spaces, which are trodden and retrodden to reaffirm pre-1959 hierarchies of authority, be they of humans or deities.[40] Charlene Makley (1999; 2003), for example, has highlighted how the gendered asymmetry practised by Tibetan pilgrims at Labrang monastery may be interpreted as covertly subversive, as it directly contravenes the state's interpretation of such practices as being 'backward' and, at worst, 'superstitious'. She shows how the dichotomy between the old traditional ways, positively associated with Tibetan mores, and the new, linked with a negatively-constructed Chinese modernity, as also noted by Shakya

[39] A body of literature has developed on the utilisation of Tibetan Buddhist notions of order and hierarchy, often subtly stated, in political protest. For analysis of a series of highly ritualised pro-independence demonstrations held in Lhasa in 1987–89, see particularly Barnett (1994), Schwartz (1994, 1996) and Mills (2001). On religious revival and protest, see particularly the edited volumes by Barnett and Akiner (1994) and Goldstein and Kapstein (1998).

[40] On the politicisation of pilgrimage, for example, see Huber (1999) and Kapstein (1998).

above, remains obstinately present. Thus, the use of narratives that starkly illustrates the Buddhist law of *samsara*—the endless cycle of rebirths that characterises the lot of the unenlightened being—can be seen as another facet of this subversion in an atheist state.

Although the Chinese government now concedes that many mistakes were made during the Cultural Revolution, such admissions of error do not imply that the state feels it is any less qualified as custodian of Tibet.[41] For whilst this era has now been firmly relegated to the past—as Jing notes, the "Chinese Communist party-state is a shrewd and often relentless manipulator of society's memory" (1996: 169)—Tibetans have consistently proved themselves to be immune to such amnesia, especially the monastic community. The paucity of compensation tendered and the considerable strictures still attached to religious practice have resulted in the state's version of history and assumption of benevolent custodianship remaining distrusted. In monasteries and nunneries across Tibet, the fear is that the cataclysmic destruction of the Cultural Revolution has been replaced by the long, slow asphyxiation of their religion by the state, in the form of swingeing regulations and bureaucracy. Thus, for many Tibetans, the Cultural Revolution continues to epitomise the Chinese presence in Tibet, and remains an unresolved and resented issue that many prefer not to discuss at all, either directly or metaphorically.[42] Assessing this period is, therefore, a complex and delicate activity, especially as much of the worst activity took place outside the periods of state-sanctioned criticism and the fear of antagonising the new masters is still a major silencer of tongues.[43]

[41] Most of the aims of the Cultural Revolution were subsequently repudiated by the state, with the official historical view of the Cultural Revolution being incorporated in the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" adopted on 27 June, 1981. Whilst it is permitted to discuss the destruction wrought during the Cultural Revolution, deviation from the official view is not allowed.

[42] Whilst criticism of certain aspects of the Cultural Revolution is now sanctioned by the state, and in mainland, urban China may even be used as a metaphor for criticising more contemporary failings of the regime, this is not a device that Tibetans generally choose to utilise. In part, this reflects an ongoing feeling of threat. It also acknowledges a complicity that was often simply the misfortune of being there—as a Tibetan friend remarked, "there are very few whose hands are entirely clean".

[43] This silence is also mirrored in exile, where complex attitudes remain towards those who remained in Tibet and are perceived to have in any way collaborated with the Chinese authorities.

Within the Tibetan context, therefore, the monks' strategies for reconstruction, with the support of their lay communities, can be seen as forming a cogent response to communal suffering and uncertainty. Within these narratives, those responsible for the destruction of religious sites, regardless of ethnicity, are located firmly within a Buddhist model of order and retribution. An extension of this narrative is the importance ascribed to the physical rebuilding of the monastic environment by the whole community. The model of order found in these narratives is, thus, reflected negatively in the physical ailments suffered by the transgressors, but positively in the physical rebuilding of the monasteries. The themes of external and internal order that will create maximum auspiciousness for the future resurgence of a Buddhist model of order, whilst avoiding the *karmic* consequences of disorder, are thus intertwined. This also places the monastic communities firmly in their previously pre-eminent positions in Tibetan society, where an essential function of the monastic community was always to provide a conduit between the mundane world of the laity and the enlightened realm of the deities, a role that had become socially, politically and economically embedded over the centuries. The monks' narratives restate that paradigm.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible by funding from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom.

## REFERENCES

Aziz, Barbara 1978. *Tibetan Frontier Families: Reflections of Three Generations from D'ing-ri*. New Delhi: Vikas.

Barnett, Robert 1994. Symbols and Protest: the Iconography of Demonstrations in Tibet, 1987–1990. *In* R. Barnett and S. Akiner (eds), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet.* London: Hurst and Co.

Barnett, Robert and Shirin Akiner (eds), 1994. *Resistance and Reform in Tibet.* London: Hurst and Co.

Bassini, Patrizia 2007. Heart Distress on the Sino-Tibetan frontier: History, Gender, Ecology and Ritual Practice in Tibetan Popular Perceptions and Experiences of Heart Distress (*snying nad*) and Other Illnesses in the Qinghai Part of Amdo. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.

Bskal bzan tshe brthan (10th Panchen Lama) 1997. *A Poisoned Arrow: the Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama.* London: Tibet Information Network.

French, Patrick 2003. *Tibet, Tibet: Dreams and Memories of a Lost Land.* London: Harper Collins.

Germano, David 1998. Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China. *In* M. Goldstein and M Kapstein (eds), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn and M. Kapstein (eds), 1998. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn, Dawei Sherap and W.R. Siebenschuh 2004. *A Tibetan Revolutionary: the Political Life and Times of Bapa Phüntso Wangye.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn, W.R. Siebenschuh and Tashi Tsering 1997. *The Struggle for Modern Tibet: The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering.* Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.

Gustschow, Kim 1997. The Religion of Locality: Local Area Gods and the Characterisation of Tibetan Buddhism *In* T. Dodin and H. Räther (eds), *Recent Research on Ladakh 7.* Ulm: Universität Ulm.

Hazod, Guntram 1998. bKra shis 'od 'bar: On the History of the Religious Protector of the Bo dong pa. *In* A. Blondeau (ed.) *Tibetan Mountain Deities: Their Cults and Representations.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Huber, Toni 1999. *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Humphrey, Caroline 1992. The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia. *Religion, State and Society*, 20(3/4): 375–89.

Janes, Craig 1999. Imagined Lives, Suffering, and the Work of Culture: The Embodied Discourses of Conflict in Modern Tibet. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 13(4): 391–412.

Jing, Jun 1996. *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kapstein, Matthew 1998. A Pilgrimage of Rebirth Reborn: The (1992) Celebration of the Drigung Powa Chenmo. *In* M. Goldstein and M. Kapstein (eds), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Makley, Charlene 1999. Gendered Practices and the Inner Sanctum: The Reconstruction of Tibetan Sacred Space in 'China's Tibet'. *In* T. Huber (ed.) *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays.* Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

—— 2003. Gendered Boundaries in Motion: Space and Identity on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier. *American Ethnologist*, 30(4): 597–619.

Mills, Martin 2001. Re-Assessing Tibetan Nationalism: Political Protest and the Sacral State in Modern Tibet. Unpublished conference paper presented at the Centre for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Conference, 'Tibetan Identities: Continuity and Change Since 1950' (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 12 September 2001).

—— 2003. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism.* London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Palden Gyatso 1997. *Fire Under the Snow: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner.* London: The Harvill Press.

Ramble, Charles 1984. The Lamas of Lubra: Tibetan Bonpo Householder Priests in Western Nepal. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.

Schwartz, Ronald 1994. Buddhism, Nationalist Protest, and the State in Tibet. *In* P. Kvaerne (ed.) *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes (1992).* Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture.

—— 1996. *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Scott, James 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Sihlé, Nicolas 2001. Les Tantristes Tibétains (*ngakpa*), Religieux dans le Monde, Religieux du Rituel Terrible: Etude de Ch'onkor, Communauté Villageoise de Tantrists du Baragaon (Nord du Népal). PhD thesis ,Université Paris X.

Smith, Warren 1996. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations.* Oxford: Westview Press.

Spence, Jonathan 1999. *Mao.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Tsering Shakya 1999. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947.* London: Pimlico.

—— 2002. Blood in the Snows. Reply to Wang Lixiong. *New Left Review*, 15: 39–60.

Sudbury, Jill 2007. An Enigmatic Renaissance: The Revival of the Bodongpa Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.

Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986. *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingma School of Buddhism.* London: Wisdom Publications.

Wang Lixiong 2002. Reflections on Tibet. *New Left Review*, 14: 79–111.

# VIOLENCE AND OPPOSITION AMONG THE NOMADS OF AMDO: EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

FERNANDA PIRIE

In his historical analysis of the polities of Tibet, Carrasco (1959: 221) describes the grasslands of Amdo as Tibet's "land of insolence":

> These remote pastoral areas have been more loosely integrated into the political structures of the various states than the agricultural centres. (...) Feuding and arbitration, that is, direct action of the people concerned, are instead the main legal mechanisms. When trade routes go through these areas, the danger of robbers is ever present. The authority of Tibetan or Chinese state officials is at times enforced, usually through local chiefs, but at other times these areas relapse into complete independence.

In the years before the Chinese occupation of the 1950s the state was practically absent on this part of the Tibetan plateau. As Carrasco says elsewhere (1959: 157–58), feuding was continuous among these tribes and Namkhai Norbu (1997: 3), who travelled through the area in 1951, recorded a song in which the Tibetan pastoralists glorified their practices of rebellion—against Tibet, the Buddhist establishment, China, the Mongols.

The image of lawlessness and insolence has a certain romantic appeal, as Coon (1951: 295) recognised when applying the term to the Middle East.[1] By contrast, several anthropologists working in comparably decentralized societies at around the same time described patterns of retaliation in quasi-law-like terms. Evans-

[1] Carrasco's description was based, to some extent, on the accounts of explorers and missionaries, who may have been keen to impress their readers with tales of adventures among uncivilized nomads (Rockhill 1891; d'Ollone 1912; Tafel 1914; Ma Ho-t'ien 1947; Rock 1956) but it is also supported by local sources (Gelek 1998: 47–49).

Pritchard (1940), to take a classic example, describes retaliation among the Nuer of southern Sudan as a structural movement between segmentary groups (1940: 158) and a blood feud as a 'tribal institution' which occurs after a breach of law (1940: 150). He also describes established forms of mediation. Similar models have been elaborated in the context of different groups in the Middle East, north Africa and the Mediterranean (Barth 1961; Peters 1967; Gellner 1969; Gluckman 1973; Black-Michaud 1975).

The relations among the Amdo nomads referred to by Carrasco could be analysed in a comparable way. The evidence from two writers who lived in Amdo before the 1950s, Robert Ekvall and Matthias Hermanns, is that feuding was an element in the structural relations between tribal groups, which formed a basic segmentary system. This is not, however, a reason to dismiss Carrasco's description of Amdo as a 'land of insolence', nor his assertion that the pastoral areas were "always ready to fight for independence" (1959: 221). Both Ekvall (1964: 1124–25; 1968: 76–77) and Hermanns (1949: 231–32; 1959: 302), also emphasise the autonomy and individuality of the Amdo nomads and the individual and immediate nature of their responses to violence. As Ekvall (1968: 75) put it, the life lead by the Amdo nomads, "places premiums on aggressive personal decision making, quick and drastic response to exigencies, and willingness to take calculated risks." The Amdo nomad is, "bristlingly independent, impatient of restraint, arrogant and oftimes truculent." (1964: 1125)

This implies a certain attitude towards authority, which is also reflected in a distinction made by Coon between the tame and the insolent in the Middle East. These are the attitudes I explore here, looking beyond the law-like and structural to focus on the role of the individual within contemporary practices of violence. Fieldwork conducted in the early twenty-first century has revealed practices of feuding and mediation among Tibetan tribes continuing even within the Chinese state.[2] A precarious form of order is maintained through the interplay of the norms of revenge and those of restraint and conciliation, while individual qualities and the values of bravery,

[2] I use the term 'tribe', following Khoury and Kostiner (1990) to refer to groups that are distinct, have relatively egalitarian internal relations and leaders who are more like chiefs than heads of a state. For the sake of linguistic simplicity I use the term 'nomad' to refer to the pastoralists of Amdo, including those from pastoralist families who have settled in town.

independence and defiance are prized and praised amongst the nomads.

Reflecting on these practices of rule-breaking and ‘insolence’, I would suggest, sheds light on the relations between the nomads and the different forms of state control that have impinged upon them, both historically and in the contemporary period.

Anthropological studies of violence have proliferated since the turn of the century (Aijmer and Abbink 2000; Schmidt and Schröder 2001; Stewart and Strathern 2002; Eckert 2004; Scheper-Hughes and Borgois 2004; Whitehead 2004). Riches (1986), widely cited in these works, emphasises the instrumental and expressive functions of violence, as well as its negative and disordering qualities. In their review of the literature, Stewart and Strathern (2002) agree that violence should be discussed in symbolic terms, not just regarded as deviant and disordering behaviour. They highlight its subjective and cultural meanings, in particular the elements of emotion and irrationality found in many practices of violence.

In this paper I consider the demonstrative aspects of the violent behaviour found among the Amdo nomads, their explicitly emotional responses to attack and injury and a seemingly irrational approval of certain practices of defiance. The anger that justifies violence must be expressed in the right way and in the right circumstances. It is part of a pattern of behaviour expected of adult men, a self-conscious display of manhood. Elsewhere, the ‘poetics’ of manhood have been described by Herzfeld (1985) among mountain villagers in Crete, while Harrison (1989), working among the Avatip of Melanesia, describes how violence is valorised and can give status to the individual. However, the approval of social disruption and rule-breaking is, in both cases, equivocal (Herzfeld 1985: 19–26; Harrison 1989: 584). I found comparable ambiguities among the Amdo nomads. Attitudes towards violence and disruption vacillate between condemnation, tolerance and valorisation, which gives rise to ambiguities in the normative control of their activities. As a result, complex and uncertain relations exist between individuals and the leaders of their groups.

In seeking to make sense of these practices of rule-breaking and defiance and, more particularly, the images of manhood that lie behind them, I suggest that one might usefully consider the ambiguities enshrined in the character of Gesar, the hero of a widely-read local epic. This highlights a tension between the tame and the

insolent, which is also evident in the contemporary period, particularly in the roles of the Buddhist *lama*s, who are called in to mediate the most problematic feuds.

## AMDO

Amdo is the local term used to refer to the north-eastern part of the Tibetan plateau, an area of grasslands bordered to the north and east by agricultural valleys. It now forms part of the Chinese provinces of Qinghai and Gansu. The lush pastures of the region support mobile groups of pastoralists who herd yaks, sheep and horses, trading their surpluses with the agricultural populations on the fringes of the plateau and with the Hui Muslims, who now live in towns established on the grasslands. From the thirteenth century Mongol, and then Manchu, forces exercised considerable power within the region, followed by the Hui in the early twentieth century. Their administrative control was concentrated in the agricultural areas of the north-east, however, while local rulers in the nomadic regions further south and west retained a significant degree of autonomy (Carrasco 1959: 155–59; Fairbank 1978: 36–37, 94; Gelek 1998: 47).

With the domination of the Dalai Lamas in central Tibet the Gelukpa sect became powerful in Amdo and in 1709 Jamyang Zhepa was recognised as an important Buddhist incarnation, going on to found the monastery of Labrang. This, along with other major monasteries, became a significant economic and political force in the region and exercised administrative control over a large area, appointing headmen to the surrounding nomadic tribes. Certain secular leaders ruled in the same way and achieved the status of minor kings, while other tribes, most notably those in Golok, combined to form powerful confederations under hereditary ruling families.

Following the Chinese occupation of 1958,[3] the power of the monasteries was destroyed, all local leaders were deposed and all pastoral activities were collectivised. However, under the reforms of the early 1980s the monasteries were allowed to re-open, albeit under

[3] This is the date referred to locally as the time when the Chinese 'came' to the region, meaning the time when the Tibetan population began to experience the full-scale suppression of their rebellions against Chinese presence and the onset of early reforms.

direct control of the state, and livestock was gradually returned to the private ownership of nomad tents. Chinese rule has introduced new units of administration: Provinces, Prefectures, Counties and *xiang* (townships). Government officials from a bewildering variety of different departments and Party units maintain registers, levy taxes, devise vaccination programmes, draw up and enforce fencing policies and enforce birth control. The new government structures have also brought considerable changes and material benefits in the form of roads, markets, schools and healthcare. The *xiang* were, however, largely mapped onto the tribal groups that existed before 1958 and the nomads insist that their social organisation, including their patterns of feuding and mediation, follow substantially the same patterns and principles as they did previously.

The nomads refer to these groups, which may consist of several thousand people, as *dewa* (Tib. *sde ba*).[4] Where a completely new *xiang* has been created this has also come to be regarded as a *dewa*. An example is Matang, in the county of Machu, which was created out of the families moved there to run a horse-breeding enterprise, now defunct. Each *dewa* is united on the basis of territory, rather than according to a descent ideology, and its members combine to worship local deities. The *dewa* are, themselves, divided into encampments or villages, known as *repkor* (Tib. *ru skor*). The *dewa* in Machu where I conducted a substantial part of my fieldwork consist of around fifteen to forty *repkor*, while a *repkor* might consist of forty tents, around 200 people. Relations between them are relatively egalitarian. Each *repkor* is under the charge of one or more headmen, *gowa* (Tib. *'go ba*), selected by the people. Their duties are to coordinate pastoral movements, allocate summer grazing land, negotiate with local authorities, organise ritual events and resolve local fighting and disputes. A council of all these *gowa* now takes charge of the affairs of the *dewa*, in the place of the hereditary leaders and those formerly appointed by the monasteries. They organise religious activities liaise with the county administration and take responsibility for resolving conflict. Although only certain of

[4] *Dewa* is the term I heard used most often, but tribes are also known as *tsowa* (Tib. *tsho ba*) or *shokwa* (Tib. *phyogs ba*) (Ekvall 1968: 28–29; Gelek 1998: 50) or even *wa dra* (Tib. *ba khra*) or *da* (Tib. *mda*) (Pirie 2005: 12). I transcribe Tibetan terms according to their local pronunciation, giving the standard spelling according to the Wylie (1959) system, in parentheses. Local terminology varies considerably and for the sake of simplicity I use the terms most common among those I worked with.

these *gowa* are officially recognised as representatives of their *xiang*, therefore, Chinese rule has resulted in a certain (unintended) democratisation of local structures.

## THE NORMS OF VIOLENCE

Members of the family I stayed with were always willing to describe the fights that had occurred in their area, both recent conflicts and famous feuds of decades past. Fighting was normally described in negative terms, as an unfortunate, dangerous and disruptive occurrence, but also as an inevitable one. Moreover, condemnation was not unequivocal. The nomads were sure about their own superiority over the farmers of the neighbouring Labrang region, for example: "We nomads are good people, we pay back our loans. We are better than those in the farming areas, who are bad and will cheat you," one man told me. "But what about all the fighting that goes on here?" I asked. "Oh, of course people fight ... when they get angry," was the reply, "but their minds are good, they don't steal from one another." There was a clear moral distinction, for him, between fighting, on the one hand, and stealing and lying, on the other. Subterfuge was morally condemned, while deliberate violence could be justified in terms of anger.

It soon became apparent that the bald assertion of the intention to take revenge, even against the counsel of others, could suffice as a rhetorical justification of violence. As my field assistant explained:

> If someone killed my son then I would get angry and say that I had to kill him. Some people might say to me, 'no you should not; you should accept money as compensation,' but I might still say, 'no, I do not want it.'

Similarly, he told me, if someone sets out with his herds towards the pastures of a neighbouring group, others might remonstrate with him, pointing out the likely consequences, but he could just reply, "no I am going to go, I want to".

It was also apparent that such expressions of anger and of the intention to embark on violence are expected in certain circumstances. In the event of an attack violent retaliation is compulsory. During my fieldwork, for example, some sheep were stolen from the tent of my field assistant. His brother went to search for them, with some friends, and identified the thief, in another *dewa*.

He declared his intention to fight immediately and had to be restrained by his friends. They returned to their own tents and long discussions ensued with family and neighbours from the *repkor*, who gradually persuaded the brother not to fight, but to allow the headman to take the matter up with his counterpart. They negotiated the return of the sheep and payment of a small monetary sum by way of apology; violence was thus averted.

The expression of an intention to fight is expected in such circumstances, but in practice strong pressure is always placed upon individuals to exercise restraint. When I talked to the headman of our *repkor*, for example, he declared that "fighting is very bad for relations between *dewa*." One of his main duties, he explained, was to resolve conflict, both within and between *dewa*. A dispute over the boundary between the summer pastures of two *dewa* was, for example, bubbling along throughout my fieldwork. The *gowa* told me that this was one of his greatest concerns, "I worry everyday about violence breaking out," he said.

The *gowa*, themselves, are often caught between a need to promote violence and to condemn it. There is one very long-running disagreement between Ngulra *dewa*, in Machu, and Arig, in the neighbouring county of Henan, for example, which has its roots in a pre-1950s pasture dispute.[5] Tensions re-emerged in the 1980s, after the nomads' *dewa* identities had been re-established. Initially the Ngulra *gowa*s attempted dialogue. This having failed, they told me, they had to rally the whole of the *dewa* in opposition to the aggressors from Arig. Over a number of years several pitched battles had taken place, resulting in the deaths of at least eighteen in the space of eighteen months in the late 1990s (Shinjilt 2007). My assistant told me that at these times the *gowa* would send round messages asking for one man from each tent to join the battle. One Ngulra *gowa* explained that one of their biggest problems was caused by an encampment on the border, which was refusing to join the hostilities, saying that it had kin relations with families in Arig. This had amounted to its withdrawal from membership of the *dewa*. Unity within the *dewa*, even if this means combining to face an aggressor,

[6] Some of my informants from Henan even traced the source of the conflict back to the Mongols' expansion into the area and subsequent retreat to Sokpo, the area now comprising Henan. The Sokpo people, although Tibetan to all intents and purposes, trace their ancestry back to these Mongols.

is as important as peaceful relations between them. Revenge relations, in this way, represent the fluid and essentally oppositional relations between tribal groups, in a manner similar to Evans-Pritchard's account of the Nuer.

Practices of violence are, therefore, hedged about by norms and expectations. There is, however, a tension between the *gowa*s' duty to prevent and resolve conflict, on the one hand, and their task of rallying the whole *dewa* to counter external aggression, on the other. Individuals must take revenge for an attack, but are also expected to bow to pressure to exercise restraint and accept a peaceful compromise. The contradiction between such norms gives rise to uncertainties and ambiguities in the evaluation and expectations of individual behaviour.

## VIOLENCE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The expression of intent to undertake violence is, to some extent, determined by considerations of status. An unavenged attack is damaging to the reputation of the whole *dewa* and the *gowa* must rally its members to respond. On the other hand, fighting within a *dewa* or *repkor* is also regarded as damaging to its reputation. When, during my fieldwork, some young men were caught stealing yaks from their own families in order to fund an escapade, others expressed shock. 'Why are they so bad?' it was asked. They were caught and severely beaten by the *gowa*, who also called a meeting to make new rules for the *repkor*. If people were caught stealing again, it was decided, they would be beaten and their families would be obliged to pay back the value of the livestock, twice over in the case of a theft from another encampment. It was very dangerous to steal from another *repkor*, my assistant explained to me, because of the risk of retaliation. There is also an element of reputation here: "families have to be friendly, and in agreement one with another," he explained, "or else other groups will think we are very bad". Another informant, from a farming area, explained that "the *gowa* tells us that other villagers will laugh at us if there is fighting in our village."

Individuals may still, however, feel themselves to be under a personal obligation to respond to aggression within the *dewa*. My assistant told me that one of his brothers, when still a boy, had gone to collect straying livestock from the pastures of a neighbouring

encampment. Objecting to the intrusion, some of the men had caught and beaten him. This had made his two elder brothers angry; they had lain in wait for the aggressors in the town and killed one of them in the ensuing fight. The mediation arrangements had involved not only the payment of a very large fine to the neighbours but also the family's expulsion from the *repkor* for three years. This was in addition to the fact that the police had incarcerated the eldest brother for eight years. The family had moved to the encampment of some distant relatives in another part of the *dewa*, although they had long since returned by the time of my fieldwork. Their son had had to fight the other men, they explained to me. But they also accepted that their expulsion had been a necessary part of the settlement process. Violence within the *dewa* is, therefore, damaging to its reputation, but this does not stop individuals from taking revenge for an attack. To engage in excessive violence, moreover, does not necessarily affect an individual's status. The same brother was being proposed as the new *gowa* of the *repkor* during my fieldwork.

As Ekvall (1968: 92) notes, the adjective *rgod*, meaning 'untamed' ('wild' or 'violent' according to the Tibetan dictionaries: Jäschke 1881: 104; Huadan Zhaxi et al: 69), was applied by way of a compliment in Amdo. I found, similarly, that an element of indiscipline was prevalent within patterns of masculine behaviour among the nomads. Men are expected to be tough and aggressive, but also to defy a range of social norms. They spend much time on their appearance and cleanliness: they seek out the newest fabrics for their traditional coats and eye-catching clothes to wear underneath; they pull their red sashes low round their hips and sweep back their lengthening hair; they outdo the women with their heavy coral jewellery and the furs used by both to trim their winter garments.[6] In such ways they challenge the limits of sartorial propriety, which have to be periodically restated by the *gowa*, as one of them told me, with a sigh. Out on the grasslands they display prowess in horsemanship and speed ostentatiously on their motor-bikes. There is an element of competition here, but also a subtle defiance of social standards. They are even expected to misbehave in more serious ways. The young men who stole the yaks from within the *repkor* were initially

[6] These qualities and patterns of behaviour are very much masculine ones. I discuss gender relations elsewhere (Pirie 2007). In 2006 the wearing of furs almost entirely ceased following a statement against the practice by the Dalai Lama.

unrepentant, laughing about their escapade. It was only after their second attempt that they were beaten by their relatives and disappeared from sight for a few days, returning shame-faced. It is the *gowa* who take personal responsibility for pulling the young into line. These leaders have to enforce the norms among the unruly and recalcitrant.

It was similar with Jamku when he found that his sheep had been stolen. He had to be restrained from fighting immediately and was only persuaded over several days to allow the *gowa* to negotiate a peaceful settlement. His initial reaction was to resist the pressure of those who took it upon themselves to impose restraint. The men, thus, challenge authority and defy the norms, while all the time continuing to live within the normative structures of their communities.

### *Resistance to Mediation*

The defiance of local norms also extends to processes of mediation. When conflict starts to escalate, especially when it involves relations between different *dewa*, mediators have to be called in, generally from outside the groups involved. In the first instance the *gowa* from neighbouring *dewa* or monks from a local monastery will try to persuade the parties to accept a temporary truce so that mediation can take place. The same people might act as mediators to determine the appropriate level of compensation and blood money in order to put an end to the round of retaliation. Their task, it is said, requires considerable skill.

In a difficult case they will call on a *lama*, a reincarnate Buddhist leader. My informants invariably mentioned their success in resolving the most serious disputes and their powers of oratory and skill in persuading the protagonists to listen. In some areas, notably Golok, historically less dominated by powerful monasteries than an area such as Machu, it is the *xhombo* (Tib. *dpon po*) and *achung* (Tib. *A skyong*), men from the former ruling families, who have the highest reputation as mediators; many take great pride in their oratorical skills. Like the *lama*s, they have charisma, which is partly derived from their status but also, in part, from their skills of persuasion and oratory.

Angry individuals are, however, are expected to resist their attempts to mediate. One drunken fight, described by a *gowa* from Machu, had occurred between two men from different *dewa*, during the course of which one had been killed. Soon afterwards a group of his neighbours had come to take revenge on the assailant's family. They had ridden right into his encampment and, not finding him there, had attacked and killed his father and a guest. This, it was explained, made the men from the assailant's *dewa* angry and determined to take revenge. The attempts of a group of mediators to broker a settlement had nearly foundered because these men had complained that the nature of the revenge was so serious that the normal blood money would not suffice. In the end the matter had only been resolved by the intervention of a senior *lama*, who had ordered a small, but symbolic, extra payment as an apology.

Even the *lama*s can, at times, be defied. The Ngulra-Arig dispute, for example, had still not been resolved during the time of my initial fieldwork, despite the intervention of senior *lama*s on three separate occasions. According to my Ngulra informants, the Arig *gowa* "did not listen." At one stage Chungi *lama* had become involved and had told the *gowa* on both sides not to fight. "We are all Tibetans," he had said.[7] However, the Arig side had still refused to withdraw from the land and they had even threatened to shoot the *lama* if he tried to intervene again. The main obstacle to settlement was that the two *dewa* were now in different provinces and Arig were relying upon the official boundary, which was to their advantage, something they would not have been able to do before 1958. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the *lama*s' attempts at mediation had been resisted.

Ekvall (1964) describes the large settlement meetings which occurred in cases of fighting between *dewa*. Even if *lama*s were mediating this was always an uncertain business, he says. In one case, one of the protagonists signalled his rejection of the whole process by simply pouring out the remainder of his tea on the ground, getting up "with contemptuous slowness" and, "without a single backward glance, walking away, thus signalling the end of the proceedings and the likely resumption of hostilities." (1964: 1147) It was the attitude of Ekvall's Tibetan companion that encapsulated the nomads' attitudes: watching this gesture of defiance he had

[7] *Ngatsö tsangme wod re* (Tib. *nga tsho tsang mai bod red*).

commented, "with a snort of mixed admiration and disgust that [the man] was 'like an old yak, stubborn and unwilling.'"

The *gowa* and the mediators, therefore, promote the norms of conciliation and individuals do not dissociate themselves from these, avowing their deep respect for their leaders, particularly the *xhombo*, *achung* and high *lama*s. On the other hand, when it comes to an instance of conflict the individual is expected to be governed by the emotion of anger and to forget the norms of compromise. As I have described elsewhere (Pirie 2007), there is a tension between two sets of norms, those of the group and those of the individual. But how is it that this tension is not resolved in favour of the norms of order, which is in the interests of the overall community? How is it that the valorisation of individual rebellion and defiance is allowed to continue to create uncertainty?

### *Anger and its Expression*

Incidents of violence are explained in terms of the individual will of those involved, whose expression of anger or the intention to take revenge is asserted as justification for violence. The obligation to take revenge is almost always expressed in individual terms: "*I* am going to go and fight him," not, "*we* should all go and fight." Revenge is taken on behalf of "*my* brothers," "*my* cousins," "*my* *dewa*." This recalls the emphasis placed by both Ekvall and Hermanns on the autonomy and individuality of the Amdo nomads and the individual and immediate nature of their responses to violence. Although there are normative limits to violence, individuals can assert anger as a reason for transgressing them. It is also widely recognised that certain individuals are more likely than others to get angry and start a fight. Concerning the pasture dispute with the neighbouring *dewa*, for example, my assistant, like the headman, expressed concern about the outbreak of violence. He thought that his *repkor* should "give" some of the land to the others in order to settle the matter. "I worry about my brother," he said, "Tsedok would just give them all the land but Debe is a problem. He says we should give them nothing. He is much more likely to start a fight." Over-reaction from Debe was both feared and expected, but this was presented as being a consequence of personal characteristics, not as deviant or immoral behaviour. When mentioning Tsedok my

assistant also adopted a faintly disparaging tone. This emphasis on the will of the individual creates a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability. As my assistant described it, if someone was killed his relatives would get angry and prepare to take revenge. “I don’t want money”, they might declare. Then there would be confusion for two or three weeks while the *gowa* attempted to negotiate a settlement.

A statement of anger or obstinacy, then, justifies revenge, even when this contradicts the norms of conciliation, but it also has to be expressed publicly and deliberately. A defiant individual must declare his intention to cross the boundary, not do so covertly. One of the Golok *xhombo* described a conflict which had been escalated by one side riding into the other’s encampment and cutting the tails of their yaks. Yaks’ tails have a minor economic value, but this symbolic insult took the conflict onto a higher level. Defiance is a masculine norm and it must be displayed. The public expression of anger can allow for the intervention of others, in the interests of conciliation. However, it also allows for moral ambiguity. Describing his actions purely in terms of his own intentions or emotions allows an individual to ignore the social consequences of his activities. The grudging admiration of defiance described by Ekvall resonated with the attitudes adopted by my own informants. Rule-breaking and defiance, if publicly asserted, can attract admiration rather than condemnation.

The rhetoric of individuality that the nomads employ on such occasions is intimately connected with the constant presentation of the self and the nomads’ self-conscious displays of masculinity, described earlier. This finds echoes in Harrison’s (1989) bold argument about the construction of aggression among the Avatip of New Guinea. As he summarises it, “Avatip concepts of aggression are not of an innate drive held in check by normative constraints, but of a temporary ritual transformation of the self.” Aggressive behaviour is an achievement, not a failure to check natural instincts. At the same time “aggression is admired, not conceived as a disruptive force to be constrained by rules and social institutions.” Melanesian societies seem to ‘socialise’ violence and evaluate it as inherently no less fully ‘social’ behaviour than peaceful co-operation (1989: 583–84). This is a more extreme example than that of the Amdo nomads, amongst whom there is a clearly expressed idea that aggression is a disruptive force and a threat to the social (the unity of

the *dewa*). Aggression is also presented as a result of a natural emotion, not a deliberate achievement. Nevertheless, the Melanesian attitudes are not so far from the those expressed by the Amdo nomads when they justify their actions in terms of anger: according to this rhetoric, anger and violence are compulsory expressions of manhood and individual will.

At the same time, Harrison recognises that the idealisation of anger often seems ambivalent among the Melanesians, posing a threat to physical existence although not, apparently, to their conceptions of the social. He cites Bateson (1958: 161–62) who suggests that the violent, reckless man, although the most admired type of personality, is also considered a labiality in many contexts. The problem he poses for his fellows is that his behaviour exemplifies their own masculine values too well. Herzfeld (1985), discusses a comparable phenomenon among Cretan shepherds. For his informants, being a good Cretan man involves being a good raider. This is demonstrated in the "poetics" of their actions, which have performative meaning, expressing "a devil-may-care love of independence" (1985: xiii). They are also able to use the segmentary model as a rhetorical tool for defending their actions. As he puts it, "all seemingly fixed moral verities ... [are] subject to negotiation and manipulation for individual purposes," (1985: 84).[8] In all three societies, therefore, the valuation of male aggression creates moral ambiguity. The emphasis on raiding, fighting, the expression of an independent will and defiance allows the wider society to valorise aggressive masculine behaviour but also to tolerate the resulting unpredictability.

Within their rhetoric of violence, the Amdo nomads thus adopt different forms of description, which invite their audience to look alternately at the event (damaging to the social group) or at the person (an angry individual). On one register all violence is a social problem. When an incident is described in this way resolution is seen as being imperative, headmen and mediators are impelled to intervene and moral pressure is put upon individuals to accept a compromise. There is, however, a different register, according to

[8] He also discusses the tension between the "congruent but potentially conflicting levels of social identity that are implied by the segmentary model" of social relations (1985: xiv), which have parallels in Amdo, as exemplified in the dual roles played by the *gowa*.

which violence is presented as a matter of individual intention and the natural result of anger. This invites others to consider the actions as those of an individual acting upon an insuppressible emotion. The resulting violence might, therefore, be a problem for the social group, but this characterisation of events is avoided by presenting violence as the result of anger.

This is what allows individuals to defy the norms of order and perpetrate violence. It is also what makes the task of mediation uncertain. During the process the mediators have to impose one view of violence, that which reflects the interests of the social group, on angry individuals: "we are all Tibetans", "fighting is very bad for relations between *dewa*", "fighting looks bad to others." But no-one can be sure that they are going to listen to the advice of their *gowa* or heed the admonitions of the *lama*. They may well continue to present themselves as angry and stubborn individuals.

## The Wild and the Tame

It is tempting for the anthropologist to describe recurrent practices of conflict in quasi-structural terms, to emphasise the reproduction of an overall social order.[9] But it is just as important to try to understand the local idioms by which those who participate in such conflict make sense of the instability of their world and, crucially, the part they themselves play in it. In the present case one might look for a model to the story of Gesar, the hero of the famous epic, Gesar of Ling. This ancient cycle of stories concerns the life of a hero of humble origins from the eastern part of the plateau who becomes a great leader, defeating enemy kings, triumphing over demonic forces and turning himself into a defender of Buddhism. He is a powerful and war-like leader. It is known throughout Tibet, and was well-known before 1958 (Roerich 1942; Namkhai Norbu 1997: xi), although in somewhat different forms, and is particularly strong in Amdo. In the contemporary period, Gesar performances have high-level state sanction (Fitzherbert 2008: 279–81) and a new edifice,

[9] Notable exceptions are the ethnographies of Melanesia and Crete already mentioned (Harrison 1989; Herzfeld 1985). Dresch (2006), analysing written tribal laws from the Yemen, also emphasises the insecurity of the tribespeople, the arbitrariness of endemic violence and the endless procrastination, avoidance and locally explicable 'exceptions to the rule', which made patterns of dispute 'untidy'.

known as Gesar's Palace, has been constructed in Golok, as a site for performances of the epic. This serves the purpose of politically domesticating a potentially uncontrolled following behind charismatic Gesar bards, but the performances are enthusiastically attended by the local population.

The epic recounts the exploits of the young Joru, as Gesar was known before he came to power. In a series of episodes he is described as getting the better of his opponents, both natural and supernatural, through cunning, trickery and down-right deception. One of the most famous scenes takes place at a horse race and this episode was being performed at a festival during my fieldwork. One Tibetan explained to me how Joru had started off as "a very naughty boy, running all over place and causing trouble," before he managed to vanquish his enemies and become a great leader. Stein (1959: 551), in his analysis of the epic, describes the young Joru as a mischievous, demonic joker, who was only later transformed into a king and authority figure.

Samuel (1994) suggests that Joru, the trickster, displays shamanic characteristics, typical of Tibetan Buddhism. These embody the power to deal directly with spiritual forces, both good and evil. He cites the Nyingmapa Tarthan Trulku's (1978: 20–22) commentary on the epic, which describes Gesar's activities as symbolic of the inner struggle for self-perfection and spiritual growth. It is these qualities, according to Samuel, that are embodied in the shamanic power of the Tantric *lama*. Tibetan Buddhism, as he explains elsewhere (1993: 217–22), encapsulates an opposition between the wild and the tame. Gesar has the shamanic power to reconcile this opposition, subduing the wild and undisciplined forces on the plateau, both enemies and demons, just as the Tantric *lama*s can subdue the undisciplined thoughts of their students.

Samuel also describes Gesar as an anti-state hero, whose victories over enemy kings can be read as resistance towards the power of the state. The wild, shamanic qualities embodied by Gesar are reflected, he says, in the uncentralised, stateless society of Amdo. In resisting and challenging the power of enemy kings Gesar is, thus, creating freedom from state structures for himself and his followers. This recalls Carrasco's (1959) description of the pastoralists' fighting for independence, only occasionally brought within the authority of a state.

Having defeated his enemies, however, Gesar does become ruler of his own state. He does not remain a wholly anti-state hero.[10] Moreover, Amdo was never an entirely stateless region. Samuel's analysis is not entirely convincing. The opposition between the wild and the tame, exemplified in the two aspects of Gesar's character, is, nevertheless, important. As Stein (1959: 570–71) emphasises, the transformation of the wild Joru into the authority figure of Gesar is one of most striking elements of the myth and both aspects of his character remain throughout his subsequent life. The king later disguises himself as a base trickster in order to confound his demonic enemies, for example. The opposition between these two elements should not, I would suggest, be regarded as having been reconciled or overcome during his transformation. The wild elements may have been tamed, but they coexist with the elements of authority and leadership.

Without wanting to imply any simple causal link, I would suggest that it is a parallel tension between the wild and the tame that is found within the contemporary patterns of behaviour of the Amdo nomads. Angry, defiant individuals resist attempts by authority figures to impose reconciliation and restraint on them; they defy their leaders and gain status by doing so. Nevertheless, those leaders are essential elements within their social structures and they represent a pattern of group relations based on common norms and values. The nomads' defiance is not an anti-state process, in the sense of negating the possibility of a state. Rather, it is tolerated because there are such strong authority figures. The very act of rebellion invites and relies upon a strong response.

This oppositional relationship is also exemplified in the relations between the nomads and their *lama*s, particularly evident in Machu, where they play an important role in conflict resolution. As Mills (2003: 259–62, 305–07) points out, the authority of the Buddhist *lama* is based upon his power to tame and subdue the wild deities who inhabit every part of the plateau, as well as on his power to discipline students and to assist souls in the afterlife. In Amdo the

[10] Samuel also makes much of the fact that the Nyingma tradition, which exemplifies the more shamanic traditions of Buddhism, is strong in eastern Tibet. However, the Gelukpa tradition, which he associates with the tame aspect of Buddhism, is also strong in Amdo, having established the powerful monasteries of Labrang and Rebgong, among others.

cults of the mountain gods, the *zhabdakh* (Tib. *gzhis bdag*), are strong. Accounts from different parts of Amdo describe the annual rituals conducted at their mountain shrines as wild affairs. The nomads ride up on their horses to erect huge wooden stakes representing arrows. They brandish guns and utter wild, whooping cries, while the shrine is wreathed in the pungent smoke of burning juniper (Stubel 1958: 48; Samten Karmay 1994: 117–19; Namkhai Norbu 1997: 27–29; Gelek 1998: 53–56; Karko 2001: 91–93). These events are an opportunity for the nomads to supplicate the deity for strength, bravery, good fortune, success in defeating their enemies and efficacy for their weapons. Namkhai Norbu records an invocation from Serthar, south of Golok, during which the nomads supplicate a range of local deities, including "wrathful local gods" and "executioners of enemies" for protection and good fortune. They ask that, "When I sally forth bravely to confront my enemies, hasten to the sharp point of my weapons! When I travel far to trade, may I be skilful in bargaining and gain!" and so on (Namkhai Norbu 1997: 28–29).

In most accounts, including those from Golok and Sharkhog (south-east Amdo) there is no indication that any Buddhist monk or *lama* is involved. In Machu, however, a *lama* was invited to participate in such an event, there known as a *tarshing* (Tib. *dar shing*), during my fieldwork: he attended to perform a short ceremony at the shrine. One of my informants also showed me a text written by a local *lama* in the early twentieth century, which the nomads could use to venerate their *zhabdakh*. Although longer and more elaborate, its terms were remarkably similar to those recorded by Namkhai Norbu, the major difference being the preliminary invocation of a long list of Buddhist deities, as well as local protectors. This can be seen as the result of a successful attempt to impose a more Buddhist idiom on local religious practices and it is not surprising that it should be found in Machu, an area much more firmly dominated by the monastery (Labrang) than Golok was. It is in Machu, too, that the *lama*s play a more prominent role in conflict resolution, compared to the hereditary leaders in Golok. But the *lama*s' involvement in the *zhabdakh* ceremonies is also interesting for the tension it sets up between the unruly and violent nature of the mountain gods and the pacifying power and influence of the *lama*s. As one of my informants explained, the *zhabdakh* can kill our enemies and bad spirits. Buddhist *lama*s and deities cannot do this, but the *lama*s can

intercede with the *zhabdakh*. The *lama*s are powerful (Tib. *btsan bo*) and people listen to them. The *lama* can, thus, intercede with the wild mountain gods and ensure that they bestow their favours on the war-like nomads. The same *lama*s, particularly in Machu, are asked to carry out the most difficult forms of mediation. Achieving a settlement means taming the anger of feuding individuals. The mediator must be a charismatic orator, someone with the power to pacify angry nomads hell bent upon revenge. It is not every *lama* who can, or is willing, to do this, nor every *xhombo* or *achung* in Golok. But those who have the charisma can (temporarily) create peaceful relations between the nomads' tribes.

Throughout these relations there is, therefore, a set of tensions between discipline and indiscipline: between, on the one hand, the unruly thoughts of the *lama*'s students, the untamed local deities and the anger and defiance of the vengeful nomads, and, on the other hand, and the disciplining power of the *lama*s and mediators, those who can tame these elements and enforce peace. It is only certain individuals who have the status and charisma to achieve this. There is a constant tension between this civilizing authority and the unruly forces of defiance. It is a tension that the pastoralists of Amdo have long accepted as a destabilising and threatening, but also an inevitable, part of their lives.

## Conclusion: Rule-Breaking and Defiance in the Twenty-First Century

I have described the Amdo practices of feuding as if they were timeless and, indeed, in many crucial respects what I observed in the early twenty-first century accords with the observations of Ekvall and Hermanns from the 1930s and 1940s. I have written elsewhere (Pirie 2005) about the ways in which the nomads have adapted their practices of mediation to the modern context of state control, suggesting that by continuing to expect blood money, even when the police have imprisoned a murderer, the nomads assert their own forms of social control against those of the state. I have also described the ways in which the state authorities recognise the success of the mediators and often ask the *lama*s and *xhombo*s to intervene in cases of large-scale feuding. Nevertheless, in certain,

quite subtle ways contemporary changes highlight underlying ambiguities in the nomads' practices of violence.

Firstly, and unsurprisingly, the nomads complain that with the rearrangement of their *dewa* and the removal of the power of the monasteries and old ruling families, things have got "mixed up". It is more difficult for the *gowa* and the mediators to settle conflict. It is clearly the case that the modern leaders, the elected *gowa* who form the councils for each *dewa*, do not have as much authority as former leaders. Mediation is not just about suggesting the right form of compromise. It requires status, skill and charisma.

Secondly, the attitude of most nomads towards the police and representatives of the government as guarantors of order is dismissive, "the police just lock people up," said one, "that does not resolve the problems; they cannot do justice, they do not care." At certain times, however, the same nomads complain that representatives of the government do not act more effectively. When fighting breaks out, they say, the police ought to use their power to intervene. They could enforce a truce which would, at least, allow the mediators to step in and do their work. The idea of a strong state is not, therefore, completely antithetical to the nomads. They do not want officials to interfere in their everyday relations, but they would like them to play a more active role in promoting mediation. The officers are understood to have a power that could be useful in restoring order.

Elsewhere (Pirie 2005), I have discussed this in terms of the relations between tribes and states. As Carrasco (1959: 221) points out, historically the nomads' tribes were only occasionally brought under the authority of the state. However, the state was never entirely absent on this part of the plateau. As well as the empires of the Mongols, Ming and Manchu, which waxed and waned over the centuries, there were small state-like organisations on the plateau itself. The nomads were always fighting for independence, as Carrasco puts it, because the state was generally present, albeit rarely dominant until the 1950s.

These fluid relations between tribes and state are mirrored, I would suggest, in the relations I have described here between individual nomads, their leaders and mediators. The practices of feuding and violence are not uncontrolled and there is not a complete disrespect for authority. Rather, individuals expect and respect the power of charismatic leaders to impose social norms upon them.

Their relationship with authority is most clearly demonstrated in their attitudes towards their religious leaders. They have the greatest respect for their *lama*s, regarding them as endowed with the status, oratorical skills and charisma both to enjoin the dangerous demons to grant them strength and also to tame the defiant attitudes of angry protagonists caught up in a round of vengeful aggression. Their own leaders, the *gowa*s and *xhombo*, embody both these tendencies. Like Gesar, they must be able to switch from, on the one hand, anger and strong leadership, rallying their *dewa* to take revenge against the counsel of a mediator to, on the other, statesman-like authority enforcing the norms of restraint and conciliation on their unruly constituents.

As Stewart and Strathern (2002: 6, ch 3) have pointed out, we must pay attention to the elements of emotion, ambiguity, irrationality and ambivalence within practices of violence. It is by asserting their personal will and anger that individuals can justify breaking the norms and defying their leaders. Such defiance is both condemned and condoned. If the presentation is successful defiant, disobedient behaviour will attract grudging admiration, even though it is liable to draw the wider community into a destructive round of violence. Individual status is acquired through displays of individuality, independence and arrogance, but such behaviour is also tolerated because the nomads expect that leaders and mediators will reimpose the norms of order and restraint upon them. Some of these leaders, the Buddhist *lama*s, can help ensure that the souls of the departed have an unproblematic passage to rebirth; they are also called upon to intercede with local deities to grant them qualities of bravery and strength; but these, in turn, are qualities which encourage rule-breaking and defiance. It is this set of tensions and oppositions, I would suggest, that gives the social order of the Amdo nomads its inherently ambiguous, uncertain and unstable quality, the appearance of lawlessness and insolence graphically evoked by Carrasco, which is still evident on the grasslands, even after the advent of the Chinese state.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I carried out eleven months of fieldwork among the pastoralists of Amdo between 2002 and 2007, concentrated in the counties of

Machu and those of the Golok region. This was supported by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle and by the British Academy. I am also grateful to Toni Huber and Alex McKay for their comments and to the assistance of George Fitzherbert and Brandon Dotson with Gesar and Tibetan *damxhwe*, respectively.

## REFERENCES

Aijmer, Göran and Jon Abbink (eds), 2000. *Meanings of violence: a cross-cultural perspective*. Oxford: Berg.

Barth, Frederik 1961. *Nomads of South Persia: the Basseri tribe of the Khamseh confederacy*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Bateson, G. 1958. *Naven*. Stanford: University Press.

Black-Michaud, Jacob 1975. *Cohesive force: feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Carrasco, Pedro 1959. *Land and polity in Tibet*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Coon, Carleton 1951. *Caravan: The story of the Middle East*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Dresch, Paul 2006. *The rules of Barat: tribal documents from Yemen*. Sanaa: Centre français d'archéologie et des sciences sociales.

Eckert, Julia (ed.) 2004. *Partizipation und die Politik der Gewalt: Hindunationalismus und Demokratie in Indien*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Ekvall, Robert 1939. *Cultural relations on the Kansu-Tibetan border.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

—— 1954. Mi sTong: the Tibetan custom of life indemnity. *Sociologus* ns., 4: 136–45.

—— 1964. Peace and war among the Tibetan nomads'. *American Anthropologist*, 66: 1119–48.

—— 1968. *Fields on the hoof.* Prospect Heights: Waveland.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1940. *The Nuer*. Oxford: University Press.

Fairbank, John (ed.) 1978. *Cambridge History of China*, Vol 10 *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911, Part II.* Cambridge: University Press.

Fitzherbert, George 2008. The Birth of Gesar: Narrative Diversity and Social Resonance in the Tibetan Epic Tradition. DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford.

Gelek 1998. The Washu Serthar: A Nomadic Community of Eastern Tibet. *In* G. Clarke (ed.) *Development, Society and Environment in Tibet*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Gellner, Ernest 1969. *Saints of the Atlas*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Gluckman, Max 1973. The peace in the feud. *In* M. Gluckman (ed.) *Custom and conflict in Africa.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Harrison, Simon 1989. The symbolic construction of aggression and war in a Sepik river society. *Man* 24: 583–99.

Hermanns, Matthias 1949. *Die Nomaden von Tibet.* Wien: Verlag Herold.

—— 1959. *Die Familie der A Mdo - Tibeter.* Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber.

Herzfeld, Michael 1985. *The poetics of manhood: contest and identity in a Cretan mountain village.* Princeton: University Press.

Huadan Zhaxi, Kevin Stuart, Gesang Norbu and Sandra Benson 1999. *Tibetan-English dictionary*. Gansu: Nationalities Press.

Jäschke, H.A. 1881. *A Tibetan-English dictionary*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Karko, Kate 2001. *Namma: a Tibetan love story*. London: Hodder and Staughton.

Khoury, Philip and Joseph Kostiner (eds), 1990. *Tribes and State formation in the Middle East*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ma Ho-t'ien 1947. *Kan Ch'ing Tsang pien ch'ü k'ao chi* (Diary of travels in the border region of Kansu, Ch'ingha and Tibet). Translated from the Chinese for the Human Relations Area Files by L. Wong. Shanghai.

Mills, Martin 2003. *Identity, ritual and state in Tibetan Buddhism: The foundations of authority in Gelukpa monasticism.* London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Namkhai Norbu 1997. *Journey among the Tibetan Nomads: an account of a remote civilization.* Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

d'Ollone, Vicomte 1912. *In forbidden China: the D'Ollone mission 1906–1909.* B. Miall (trans.) London: T. Fisher Unwin.

Peters, Emrys 1967. Some structural aspects of the feud among the camel-herding Bedouin of Cyrenaica. *Africa*, 37: 262–82.

Pirie, Fernanda 2005. Segmentation within the state: the reconfiguration of Tibetan tribes in China's reform period. *Nomadic Peoples*, special issue, C. Kerven and K. Bauer (eds), *Pastoralism in Post-Socialist Asia*, 9(1): 83–102.

—— 2007. Order, individualism and responsibility: contrasting dynamics on the Tibetan plateau. *In* K. von Benda-Beckmann and F. Pirie (eds), *Order and disorder: anthropological perspectives*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Riches, David 1986. The phenomenon of violence. *In* D. Riches (ed.) *The anthropology of violence*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Rock, J.F. 1956. *The Amnye Machen range and adjacent regions: a monographic study.* Roma: Is.M.E.O.

Rockhill, W.W. 1891. *The land of the lamas: notes of a journey through China, Mongolia and Tibet.* London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Roerich, G.N. 1942. The Epic of King Kesar of Ling. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 8(7): 277–311.

Samuel, Geoffrey 1993. *Civilized shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan societies*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

—— 1994. Gesar of Ling: Shamanic power and popular religion. *In* G. Samuel, H. Gregor and E. Stutchbury (eds), *Tantra and popular religion in Tibet*. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture.

Samten Karmay 1994. Mountain cults and national identity in Tibet. *In* R. Barnett and S. Akiner (eds), *Resistance and reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Phillippe Borgois (eds) 2004. *Violence in war and peace*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell.

Schmidt, Bettina and Ingo Schröder (eds), 2001. *Anthropology of violence and conflict*. London: Routledge.

Shinjilt 2007. Pasture fights, mediation, and ethnic narrations: aspects of the ethnic relationship between the Mongols and Tibetans in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces. *In* U. Bulag and H. Diemberger (eds), *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface*. Leiden: Brill.

Stein, R.A. 1959. *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Stewart, Pamela and Andrew Strathern 2002. *Violence: Theory and ethnography*. London and New York: Continuum.

Stubel, Hans 1958. *The Mewu Fantzu: a Tibetan tribe of Kansu*. F. Schutze (trans.) New Haven: Hraf Press.

Tafel, Albert 1914. *Meine Tibetreise: eine Studienfahrt durch das nordwestliche China und durch die innere Mongolei in das östliche Tibet*. Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig.

Tarthan Trulku 1978. Gesar: awareness through myth. *Gesar*, 5(2): 20–22.

Whitehead, Neil (ed.) 2004. *Violence*. Oxford: James Currey.

Wylie, T.V. 1959. A standard system of Tibetan transcription. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 22: 261–76.

# WHEN BROTHERS SEPARATE: CONFLICT AND MEDIATION WITHIN POLYANDROUS HOUSES IN CENTRAL TIBET

HEIDI FJELD

## INTRODUCTION

In Tibet serious domestic conflicts are public concerns. They develop within a social organisation in which the strengthening and perpetuation of established households are serious moral issues. The morality of social organisation—what could be termed the social order—is fundamental to the development, perception, and mediation of domestic conflicts and, importantly, it defines the character of such disputes. If we examine the character of different forms of conflict and processes of mediation the nature and significance of this social order becomes apparent. In this chapter I discuss the partition of polyandrous houses and the issues of co-partnership, relative age and the position of husbands, which reveals the house to be the prime social institution in the village community, that with which individuals identify and are identified by others. By looking at the development of domestic conflicts and, more importantly, the handling of these, it also becomes clear that the context in which they develop is fundamentally a social one, and that the mediating actors do not activate a religious apparatus of value and negotiation, but argue primarily on social grounds.

## POLYANDRY IN RURAL TSANG

The context for this discussion of domestic conflicts is the ongoing increase in fraternal polyandry (*zasum* [Tib. *bza' gsum*])[1] in Panam

[1] In order to make the Tibetan terms more available to all readers I use a simplified version approximate to the pronunciation of each word. The proper spellings are given in brackets on the first appearance, using the Wylie standard (1959) for transcribing Tibetan into roman letters.

valley, a county in Shigatse prefecture in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China. Traditionally, polyandry was a marital form found among those with hereditary access to land (Goldstein 1971a, 1976, 1978b; Stein 1972; Aziz 1978a). Today, however, people of all social backgrounds, including the former landless farmers (*düchung* [Tib. *dud chung*], locally simply referred to as *yokpo* [Tib. *g.yog po*]) and the skilled workers (the blacksmiths, butchers, and corpse-cutters) arrange polyandrous marriages for their children (Ben Jiao 2001, Wellens 2006, Fjeld 2007). In Sharlung,[2] the village where I conducted my fieldwork, fifty-seven percent of all marriages were polyandrous ones. Correcting for demographic distribution, it seems that most families in this village with more than one son arrange polyandrous marriages today (Fjeld 2007). This unexpected increase must be understood as being closely related to the implementation of the national land reform, called the Household Responsibility System, at the beginning of the 1980s. With this reform the household was recognised as the basic unit for administrative purposes and for the distribution of rights and duties within the village organisation; individual access to land was channelled through membership of a household (Judd 1994). This renewed emphasis on the household established all farmers as structurally similar to the traditional landowners, the taxpayers (*trepa* [Tib. *khral pa*], locally referred to as *genpo* [Tib. *rgan po*]). These new household-based relations to land and their economic consequences have *enabled*, rather than forced, formerly landless farmers to arrange polyandrous marriages for their sons, and by doing so, to engage in a long-term process of transforming their households from nuclear families to the socio-symbolic houses of high standing, of the kind formerly associated with land-holding taxpayers, *trepa*.[3] The increase in fraternal polyandry in Panam today indicates social mobility and is one of a wider set of practices by which the former landless labourers adopt cultural practices of the upper classes, such as polyandry, inheritance rights and patterns of conflict resolution.

---

[2] The village name, as well as all personal and house names used are pseudonyms.

[3] I use the term 'house', in the sense suggested by Lévi-Strauss (1983) to signify the social unit encompassing both the physical buildings and land, and the people who inhabit it (see page 252).

## DOMESTIC CONFLICTS

Scholars of Tibet from various disciplines have emphasised the conflicts that occur within polyandrous marriages and the partition that often results. This interest in its problematic sides could be seen as reflecting the underlying notion that polyandry is contrary to Western ideas of male sexuality. Claims about conflict-ridden polyandrous marriages are found in both academic and popular studies (Goldstein 1978a; Levine and Silk 1997; Trevithick 1980; Haddix 2001). It is important to note, however, that although many polyandrous marriages divide at some point, many also stay together, either in the original constellation or with a reduced number of people in the marriage. Moreover, the sources of conflict leading to a divide are not necessarily polyandry-specific. According to the township leaders in the area of this study, the most common domestic conflict concerns inter-generational disagreements and involves the in-married wife (*nama* [Tib. *mna' ma*]) and her mother-in-law. This type of conflict dominates, independent of marital form.

Nevertheless, Tibetans acknowledge that polyandry is a more demanding form of marriage than monogamy, although less demanding than polygyny due to the problematic competition between sets of heirs in the latter. When considering domestic conflicts in polyandrous houses, three polyandry-specific causes can be distinguished: first, an unfair distribution of affection and sexual access (the *nama* showing disrespect towards one of the husbands); second, an unfair contribution to, and distribution of, economic resources; and third, the youngest husband's lack of interest in the *nama* (particularly in cases of significant age difference between the two). In addition, conflicts between the *nama* and her sisters-in-law are common in polyandrous houses; although these are not strictly polyandry-specific, they are more frequent and of a particular character in such houses.

Many Tibetans consider polyandry to be a demanding form of marriage because of its complex inter-personal constellations in terms of the distribution of affection. When talking about conflicts and fissions in polyandrous marriages, villagers in Sharlung often claim that most of these are of the first type, that is, the *nama*'s inability to distribute her affection and sexual access in a fair and even way amongst her husbands. These claims place responsibility on the *nama*, alone. However, if we look particular cases of

escalating conflict and divorce in the village, it seems that the *nama* and her eldest husband tend to operate as a union. In situations in which the *nama* has a problematic relation with one or more of the younger brothers, the eldest husband will often side with her and, similarly, she will support him in his conflicts with his brothers (or with parents, as is often the case). Conflicts involving the eldest husband or the *nama* might result in divorce and the establishment of a new household, but only in very few cases do the *nama* and a younger husband move and re-establish themselves elsewhere.

The perception that the *nama* is central in polyandrous conflicts is, indeed, strong among the villagers in Sharlung, in much the same way that a successful polyandrous marriage is also attributed to the *nama*. At the same time, it is clear that, in practice, the various husbands and in-laws play an important part in both functional and dysfunctional polyandrous marriages. Importantly, conflicts develop according to the symbolic position of those involved, in particular, I shall argue, the symbolic relations between the person and the house to which he or she belongs.

The following example concerns the escalation of a conflict in a polyandrous house in Sharlung, called Norkhang. The conflict involved a range of persons of both the younger and elder generations in the house, and as an example it serves to highlight the central persons in a polyandrous house and to illustrate common areas of conflicts. When not resolved, a domestic conflict becomes a public affair in the village. The parties involved activate both informal and formal mediation resources. The division of the Norkhang house illustrates how the handling of domestic conflicts reinforces both the fundamental importance of relative age in a polyandrous organisation, on the one hand, and the significance of the social, rather than religious, order in mediation and settlement, on the other. Fundamentally, it points to the inter-connections between conflicts and the morality of sociality in this agrarian region of Tibet.

## *Dividing the Norkhang House*

Norkhang is an old house with former *trepa* status, which has reconfirmed its position as an important social unit in the village since the land reforms of the 1980s. When the story began, the house consisted of the household head, his wife and her unmarried sister,

three married sons and their common wife, one nun daughter, three unmarried younger children and one grandson (the *nama*'s son). The core of the dispute in the house concerned relations between members of the polyandrous union, on the one hand, and the elder generation, as well as their daughter, the nun, on the other hand. A polyandrous marriage had been arranged for the three eldest sons, with their agreement, with a woman from the neighbouring valley. In the beginning, it seemed as if all four persons involved in the marriage were happy with the arrangement. However, two years after the wedding the Norkhang house was divided, as the two eldest sons, their common wife and only child moved and established a new household on their own. Located on one of less fertile plots of their land, they called the house Norshön—the 'little Nor.'

The problems had started shortly after the wedding. While the *nama* had established good relations with her two eldest husbands, she often argued with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law regarding the division of domestic and agricultural chores. It was, in particular, the dominant role of her sister-in-law (the nun) that caused many of the quarrels, and the *nama* felt badly treated. In the same period, the household head claimed that the *nama* did not manage the *khora khor* ([Tib. *skor ra khor*] sexual distribution) well, leaving the youngest husband unhappy. Moreover, the household leader grew more and more discontent about what he found to be a too limited economic contribution from his eldest son. The members of Norkhang were, as most households in the area, subsistence farmers who also kept a few sheep and goats. In addition, some members worked outside the village, bringing cash back to the household. In Norkhang it was the eldest son who was working in the construction business in Shigatse, and it was his contribution to the household that his father found too limited.

When the conflict had continued for more than a year, the power constellations in the household polarised: the *nama* and her eldest husband on the one side, and the household leader and his wife and their daughter, on the other side. Later, the second eldest husband also sided with the *nama* and his eldest brother. The rest of the household members remained uninvolved.

The further escalation of the conflict led to a physical fight between the head of the household and his eldest son. Following the fight, the two did not wish to share a house and a move was prepared. However, negotiations over the inheritance proved to be even

more complicated than the original attempts to mediate. According to traditional norms of land division, the two sons of the house were entitled to equal inheritance of land, while the *nama* was entitled to, in addition to her original dowry, a compensation for the work already conducted in the household that she was leaving. During the implementation of the Household Responsibility System at the beginning of 1980s, each individual received 2.4 *mu*[4] of land in Sharlung and, accordingly, the sons claimed two individual shares of land, that is 2.4 *mu* of land each. These claims are in line with what Goldstein (1971a) describes as the *ideal* inheritance norms, in which all sons, but not daughters, enjoy equal inheritance rights, although the amounts claimed were influenced by the state's distribution of land under the Household Responsibility System. Moreover, they claimed land instead of cash as compensation for the *nama*'s work, in the amount of half a share of land, that is 1.2 *mu*.[5] The household head refused all three claims. His position was that the two sons should inherit no more than 1.5 *mu* of land each, while the *nama* should get some compensation for her work, to be paid in barley. This again, was not accepted by the three who had moved.

One could expect that land division after the Household Responsibility System would have been made easier by the fact that all members had brought a quantified share of land into the household. Moreover, according to the National Inheritance Law of 1985, each child of a household should be entitled to inherit a full share of land (Palmer 1995), that is, in the case of Sharlung village, 2.4 *mu*, upon exclusion or partition. However, age-neutral inheritance rights among sons remain little more than a theoretical principle in Panam. In practice, the transfer of land is negotiated in each individual case.[6] This negotiation is carried out in relation to relative age, on the one hand, and to the social character of the domestic group involved, on the other.

[4] That is, some 0.4 acres.

[5] They also claimed wood from one fourth of the ceiling.

[6] The local interpretation of the right to use land after the reforms varies to a great extent in Tibet, and in China as a whole, but in Sharlung, people perceive the land to be tied to the household rather than to individuals, on a lower level, and to the village on a higher level. This is, for instance, seen in the lack of redistribution of land to the village after the death of a land-holding person, as described from villages surround Lhasa. (Yeh 2004)

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND RELATIVE AGE

Several individuals and representatives of institutions tried to settle the Norkhang dispute over inheritance. Four levels of traditional and more recent mediators were involved in the process; the *ganye* network of the house, the village leader, the township leadership and the county court.[7] These four institutions of mediation are different in character. *Ganye*, short for *gabo nyebo* ([Tib. *dga' po nye bo*], those near and dear), are moral networks between houses, as well as between individuals. It was explained to me that today the *ganye* relations, as well as the village leader, are obliged to interfere, even if not asked, while the institutions of the new state administration do not instigate their own involvement in domestic conflicts unless they are approached by one of the parties. Moreover, the emphasis put on social order in the handling of domestic conflicts varies between the different mediators.

The ongoing Norkhang conflict was well known in Sharlung village and some individuals had previously tried to mediate, without results. The first serious external attempt to resolve the conflict was initiated by individuals with *ganye* relations to the Norkhang house. These networks can go back several generations, and each individual member of a house inherits its *ganye* relations. Most people in Sharlung, with the exception of the lowest ranked begging musicians, have such *ganye* relations, although the size of the networks varies to a great extent. Aziz has pointed out that *ganye* is a moral system, which has a "particular nature, distinct from the moral systems that guide other social behaviour, e.g. family ties, economic choices, and piety" (1978b: 4). It represents a wide social network of people, forming an unbounded category with no corporate aspects in terms of common goals or functions—*ganye* do not form social groups. One of the core obligations of the *ganye* is information exchange, that is to secure the flow of information between the individual and the community. Such an obligation is a moral one and concerns the reputation of the individual (person or house) and its participation in village life (Aziz 1978b). Mediation in conflicts involving both individuals and houses is an obligation of the *ganye*.

In the case of the Norkhang conflict, the two men who first came to mediate were *ganye* of the house. The loyalty of the *ganye* is

[7] Domestic conflicts, such as the Norkhang case, are in general not brought before the village meeting, in the way Pirie (2007)describes for disputes in Ladakh.

expected to lie with the house, rather than one particular individual, and although the two were also friends of the household head, they claimed that their loyalty was to Norkhang. Being presented with the two diverging claims, the *ganye* quickly sided with the household head and his wife, on the ground that the house should be compensated for the loss brought upon it by the division of land and the departure of the eldest son, the future household head. Therefore, they held, the sons should not inherit their full share of land, and they should also not receive land for the *nama*, as her well-being was no longer the responsibility of the house.

Being unhappy with the conclusions of the *ganye*, the house's eldest son, his brother and their wife approached the village leader for support. In this particular village, the leader is an important mediator, being involved in most domestic conflicts, either as *ganye* or village headman. Due to the fact that he has been the village leader since the mid-1960s, he has developed an extensive network of *ganye* relations and also a good reputation as a mediator.[8] Having been approached, the village leader consulted his younger deputy about the Norkhang case. They both agreed with the solution launched by the *ganye* suggesting that the sons should receive 1.5 *mu* each, while the *nama* should receive compensation in barley, rather than in land. "We have to consider the situation of the parents", the village leader later explained, "and for them, it is a great disadvantage that their two sons move".

Desperately trying to avoid poverty, the two older brothers went to the township leaders and asked for their assistance. Two leaders discussed the case and decided that the Norkhang household head should provide 2.4 *mu* of land to each of the two sons, as this was their full share, as allocated during the land division in 1980. Moreover, the township leaders claimed that the *nama* should be compensated for her work in the household, a compensation they set to be one *mu* of land, as well as five RMB[9] per day of work. After two years of marriage, this turned into 3600 RMB. The *nama* and her husbands were satisfied with this solution. However, the household head refused to pay, as he claimed that these township leaders were not competent to settle a division of land. First of all, he said, one of

[8] I believe that his good reputation does not reflect his office, as such, but more significantly his personal skills. Other leaders in neighbouring villages were controversial and seldom used as mediators by the villagers.

[9] 100 RMB was equivalent to 9,44 euros in 2007.

them was biased towards the *nama* because they were from the same natal village. Moreover, he continued, the leaders did not act in accordance with local norms of division, as they had suggested compensation be given to the *nama* in land, not in money or kind. I return to this point later in the chapter.

Following the decision in the township, the household head approached the county court, the highest legal authority in the area. There, three judges decided that the household leader should not give land to the *nama*, but only compensation in cash. This was set to be 1,800 RMB, that is five RMB per day for one year, and the household leader was to pay as soon as possible. However, the two sons of the house should inherit their two full shares of land. Borrowing money from his associates, he paid 1,000 RMB in cash and 1,000 *yin* (500 kilos) of barley to the Norshön household. Four years later the rest of the compensation had not been provided, and the relations between the two parts of the household remained hostile. It was unclear how much land had been transferred from Norkhang to Norshön, as the individuals involved claimed different amounts. What seemed to be clear, however, was that the decision of the county court and the township leaders, although carrying (official) legal authority, had not been implemented.

### *Mediating the Security of the House*

The four levels of mediators, the *ganye*, the villager leader, the township leaders and the county court, shared similarities but acted upon differing grounds. As this chapter concerns the relations between social order and conflict, the point I make here deals primarily with those forms of mediation closely connected to the morality of social organisation, namely the *ganye* and the village leaders. Common to these is the emphasis they put on the elder generation and, accordingly, on the house of origin. By doing so, they morally and materially penalised those who move. These sanctions vary, I shall argue, according to the position of the sons leaving the house, positions that are fundamentally defined by the principle of relative age.

In the Norkhang case, both the *ganye* relations and the village leader disagreed with the claim of full land inheritance for the sons and land compensation for the *nama*. One central element in their

concern for the elder generation was obviously the loss of work force. More importantly, I argue, the move of the two sons and their wife could be seen in relation to what seems to be an ongoing development in the organisation of sociality in Tibet, whereby the strengthening and perpetuation of already-established households has gained new importance and value for local villagers. The domestic groups—the households or houses—are the prime social units of belonging in Panam, as elsewhere in the Tibetan agrarian regions (Aziz 1978a; Levine 1988; Pirie 2007). Tibetan houses could be explained in the terms used by Lévi-Strauss when defining the house as a 'moral person'. He sees the house as:

> A corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both. (1983: 174)

Such houses embody both the households in which people produce and reproduce, and the social group to which the individuals belong and with which they identify. The houses are socio-symbolic institutions, which are buildings, ideas, categories, and values (Howell 1995; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). In agrarian Tibet they also manifest the closest kin. Conflicts are dealt with accordingly, in the context of increasing emphasis on the perpetuation of the named houses in Panam. There is an explicit concern with polyandrous houses, as a successful polyandrous marriage is seen as one of the strategies for building and maintaining a named house with social status. Parting from a house in order to establish a new household is morally and economically sanctioned by both the *ganye* and the village leaders because, I suggest, departure from a house undermines the social order of what is a house-based organisation.

Central to the perpetuation of the named house is the issue of inheritance, and particularly the transfer of land. Polyandrous marriages are particularly meaningful in a context in which houses are emphasized as the prime social group, because with polyandry a house produces only one set of heirs per generation and, hence, minimizes the division of land through generations. The rationale involves the equal inheritance rights of all the sons of a house, an ideal that villagers readily assert. This means joint inheritance, in cases of a successful polyandrous union, and, in theory, equal division on partition. However, in practice, it seems that land is not

divided equally amongst all sons in such cases, but contextually decided through negotiation. Similar practices were well-known from the *trepa* estates of the period before the Chinese takeover.[10] Although the equal inheritance right of all sons is, thus, one of the cultural principles underlying the practice of polyandry in Panam, individual sons who choose to move out and activate their inheritance rights are materially sanctioned. This is particularly apparent when a son parts from his natal house in order to establish a new household in the same village, as this establishment necessitates the transfer of land from the natal house. There are, however, alternatives open to those younger sons who, for various reasons, are not included in a polyandrous marriage with their brothers. Today, these alternatives are primarily to enrol in school and to settle in an urban centre, to marry uxorilocally (as a *makpa* [Tib. *mag pa*]) into a house with no sons and, thus, become the head of household in the wife's natal house, or to seek work in the construction business outside the village. These options are available to a lesser extent for the eldest son in a house. The significance of relative age in domestic conflicts should not, therefore, be underestimated and informs both the development of conflict and the resulting mediation and resolution process.

## CO-PARTNERSHIP AND THE PERCEPTION OF CONFLICTS

Although people in Sharlung claim that the most common division of polyandrous marriages occurs when the eldest husband and the *nama* establish a new household on their own, the demographic history of the area indicates differently. Looking at the household constellations over time, it is apparent that it is the youngest husband who most commonly parts from polyandrous marriages in Sharlung today. Such a discrepancy could be seen as an indication of the differing social implications that the partition of the youngest or the eldest husband has for the continuity of the house as a social group. Moreover, it points to the interconnections between the development and handling of domestic conflicts, on the one hand, and the social order within which these conflicts appear, on the other.

---

[10] Aziz notes that only husbands that have not yet had intercourse with the wife can expect full inheritance upon partition (1978a: 145).

As illustrated by the Norkhang case, conflicts that involve the eldest husband of a polyandrous marriage are serious and often lead to public discussion and mediation in order to minimize the risk of partition. When this leads to the establishment of a new household, the relations between the eldest husband and his natal house often remain problematic for years. Problems that involve the youngest husband, on the other hand, only seldom develop into full-blown conflicts requiring outside mediation, and post-partition relations generally remain good. This must be seen in the context of the relation that the younger husbands have with the group of husbands as a whole and the group's relations with the house as a social category.

## *Relative Age and Encompassment*

Relations between brothers in polyandrous houses are also relations of co-partnership in marriage. The relation between co-husbands in polyandry has been a theme of heated discussion in the literature, as it relates to the very definition of polyandry as a marriage form. Some scholars have claimed that polyandrous unions should not be termed marriages at all, but, rather, polykoity, because, they argue, the wife is in reality married only to the eldest in the fraternal group, while the younger ones are merely co-residing with the monogamously married couple (Fisher 1952).[11] Although I disagree with the classification of polyandry as non-marriage, it must be acknowledged that the positions of the co-husbands are ranked and that the younger husbands are thoroughly subordinated. Although personal attributes might attract a preference in certain contexts, a husband can always claim his rights based on his position in the age hierarchy. Moreover, relative age influences the relations between the various husbands and their wife, and often manifests in a particularly strong emotional bond between the wife and the eldest husband.

The issue of relative age has been given surprisingly little attention in theoretical debates in the social sciences (Needham 1974; Gottlieb 1992). In order to discuss relative age and co-

[11] Fraternal polyandry has taken different forms among Tibetan-speaking groups and, indeed, in some areas such as Ladakh the wife is only married to the eldest son of a house (Pirie 2007: 45–46).

partnership in polyandry I find an analytical perspective based on Hertz's classic article on *The Pre-eminence of the Right-Hand* (Hertz 1973 [1909]) particularly valuable. Hertz's article was followed by a discussion between Needham (1973) and Dumont (1979) on the relevance of his analysis with regards to dual opposition, in general, and the preponderance of one of the opposites, in particular. The latter principle is particularly relevant to the relations between co-husbands in Tibetan polyandrous marriages, and its significance for the discrepancies found in the handling of domestic conflicts. Indeed, a focus on relative age might bring new insights to the social context and the social order within which these domestic conflicts develop.

In his essay Hertz illustrates the widespread occurrence of pre-eminence given to the right, as opposed to the left:

> An almost insignificant bodily asymmetry is enough to turn in one direction and the other contrary representations which are already completely formed. Thereafter, thanks to the plasticity of the organism, social constraint adds to the opposed members, incorporates in them those qualities of strength and weakness … which in the adult appear to spring spontaneously from nature. (1993 [1909]: 21)

Hertz's point is that the relation between right and left becomes one of qualitative difference, and that manifestations of the difference are found not only in nature but also in religion and in the body. He vividly describes the inferiority of the left in various cultures and points to the common feature that while the right hand is able to conduct independent actions, the left hand is passive and dependent. He further writes: "The preponderance of the right hand is obligatory, imposed by coercion, and guaranteed by sanctions; contrarily, a veritable prohibition weighs on the left hand and paralyzes it." (1973 [1909]: 6) The different qualities of the right and the left hand can be described as based on organic symmetry, wherein the right hand is in a position to stand for the whole body, and thus incorporates also the left hand. This ability of the right hand to *stand for the whole* is central to its superiority, Hertz emphasizes.

In 1973, Needham edited *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, in which the authors discussed the ideas in Hertz's essay. The book was an attempt to "arrive empirically at a theory of thought and action" and included eighteen empirical cases illustrating the two basic points that "oppositions can validly be established, and that these can be systematically interrelated" (Needham 1973: xviii). The problem, according to Dumont's later

publications (1979), is that the interrelations suggested by Needham et al. do not systematically analyse the classified oppositions and homologies, as these are de-contextualised with regards to overall relations. He writes: "In short, the distinction of situations ceases to be considered as pertinent at the moment we pass from elements to the set as a whole …" (Dumont 1979: 808). The various articles in Needham's anthology describe the oppositions between right and left in a number of societies, but they do not attempt to analyse the hierarchical relations between these two opposed sides. Hence, rather than renewing Hertz's well-made points on the polarity of oppositions, Dumont claims, Needham's edited volume simply illustrates them.

Dumont, having already published the famous and much contested *Homo Hierarchicus*, suggests that the relations between oppositions, which Hertz pointed out to be characterized by incorporation, should more precisely be seen as hierarchical relations of a particular kind: "the two terms or poles do not have equal status: one is superior, the other is inferior" (1979: 810). According to Dumont, seeing the opposition as a polarity or complementarity will not enable a proper answer, although it poses the question of why pre-eminence is given to one side. What seems to be the main problem is the lack of focus on context, that is the fact that the oppositions cannot be defined in themselves, but "only in relation to a whole" (1979: 810).[12] What Dumont calls a hierarchical opposition is the opposition between a set and an element of this set, where the element is identical to the set of which it forms a part (1979: 809). Further, the element is also in opposition to the whole and as such creates a double relation. This double relation connects to the nature of hierarchical opposition and informs Dumont's well known conclusion that "essentially, hierarchy is the encompassing of the contrary" (1979; see also Dumont 1970: 66). Encompassment here launches a perspective that emphasizes the differentiation of the parts in their relation to the whole and the characteristics of certain parts to incorporate other parts, while at the same time symbolically representing the whole, that is the set of parts incorporated.

Much has been written on fraternal solidarity among Tibetans in the Himalayan region (Prince Peter 1963; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Levine 1988), and elsewhere (Radcliffe-Brown 1941). Through

---

[12] In Hertz's example of the right and the left hand, this whole is also tangible, since it is the human body.

Tibetan theories of procreation, a group of brothers is seen to be, if not identical, at least similar in constitution. Similarity produces expectations of fraternal solidarity and good relations, and these expectations are made explicit when fraternal polyandry is arranged within a house. Yet fraternal solidarity does not exclude hierarchical organisation. Co-partnership in polyandrous marriages could fruitfully be understood as a hierarchical relation, in the Dumontian sense of the term, where one part encompasses the other parts, and this encompassing part comes to stand for the whole. The eldest husband, then, encompasses the younger husbands, not only in terms of the internal organisation of the marriage but also in terms of symbolic representation. He is to be seen as the ultimate value of the marriage, with a particular significance for the house. The underlying principle of relative age and the process of encompassment is gradually secured through socialisation in the house, during which the eldest son learns to act responsibly and authoritatively and the younger brothers learn to accept their roles as subordinated. Through socialisation, the hierarchy of relative age is internalized and, hence, naturalized. Such encompassment can be seen in various contexts, from the wedding process to the organisation of daily life. During the marriage negotiations, for instance, the eldest husband travels (in disguise) to meet the potential wife. When doing so, he represents the group of brothers. In the rare cases in which the eldest does not participate in such a meeting, the younger brothers cannot replace him (Fjeld 2007: 186–87). The hierarchy of relative age is also displayed during the wedding ceremony. The eldest husband is placed at the wife's side, followed by his brothers, according to their relative age. He is, moreover, the first to be with her sexually. Encompassment, as an analytical concept, provides a useful perspective on co-partnership, which enlightens the often contradictory handling of marital problems involving the eldest or the youngest husbands in polyandrous marriages.

The handling of the Norkhang conflict and, in particular, the mediators' emphasis on securing the welfare of the eldest generation must, then, be seen in relation to the position of those who move. Relative age and the organisation of authority among brothers and co-husbands is significant, not only in terms of same-generation relations, but also in terms of inter-generational relations. The eldest son of a house is not only the naturalized authority among his groups of brothers, he is also the future head of the house, that is the heir to

their father's position. The eldest son is, hence, central to the perpetuation of the house as a social unit in the village community. The partition of the eldest son left the Norkhang house significantly impaired. Firstly, his move had included the *nama* (and their child), that is the reproductive unit of the house. Secondly, the estate was left smaller after the division, both in terms of land and labour. Thirdly, Norkhang lost its future household head and representative. The process of parting was very difficult and led to hostile relations between the eldest son and his natal house. This was not only emotionally problematic but also had a significant impact on future work exchanges and participation in mutual aid systems, which are central to the organisation of Tibetan village life.

Some might argue that it is the close relation between the eldest son and his wife that makes his partition devastating to the house. The *nama*, as the reproductive subject, obviously holds a crucial role in the succession of the house. However, she is not, I believe, the main reason for the dramatic development of domestic conflicts involving the eldest son of the house. Cases where the *nama* is unhappy and wants to divorce are dealt with in a different way, and do not lead to the level of conflict that the Norkhang case illustrates. This must be seen in relation to the fact that although divorce is unfortunate, a *nama* is fundamentally replaceable, while an eldest son is not.

The central position of the eldest son in a house is not only a matter of the social and political perpetuation of the established house, but also has a significant symbolic element which reinforces the loss upon partition. Seeing fraternal relations as a hierarchy of encompassment, the eldest brother constitutes a significant part of the house's composition and, as an ultimate value of the house, he also symbolically manifests the whole, in a way that those being encompassed cannot. This aspect of the relation between the house and the eldest son, in which he symbolically stands for the house as a socio-symbolic unit, strengthens the notion of his partition as a problematic move, which can develop into a full-blown inter-generational conflict. The younger sons, on the other hand, are in a fundamentally different relation to their natal house, as they, although being significant parts of the household composition, are only peripheral to the perpetuation of the house as a socio-symbolic unit. Being symbolically encompassed by their eldest brother, the implications of a wish to part are less severe for the future of the

house, and the handling of conflicts involving younger sons and husbands reflect their peripheral positions. At the same time as a peripheral position limits the influence of the younger husbands in polyandrous marriages, it also enables a simple partition from wedlock upon discontentment.[13]

### *When Youngest Husbands Leave*

The origins of the conflict in the Norkhang house point to what the local leaders claim is the most common type of domestic conflict in Panam, namely inter-generational disagreements over the distribution of work. Additionally, it illustrates the significance of a wife's fair distribution of affection and access to sexual and reproductive capacities in polyandrous marriages. The latter is a concern in all forms of polygamy in Panam and villagers declare the wife to be responsible for securing such fairness. However, there is another aspect of polyandrous marital relations, which villagers do not emphasize when discussing cases of conflict and mediation, namely the discontent of younger husbands in the case of a significant age gap between them and the wife. While strong moral and social pressure is put on the eldest to remain in his natal house, the discontent of the youngest husband is handled very differently, in a way that emphasizes a smooth transition to a resolution. When looking at the demographic data of Sharlung village, it is clear that a decrease in numbers of co-husbands is common to many polyandrous marriages. This is particularly evident in the originally large polyandrous marriages (involving four or more co-husbands) where the youngest husbands have moved from the house.

It is in larger polyandrous marriages that there is most often a significant age span between the wife and the youngest husband. Upon arranging a marriage, age is seen to be important for securing successful relations, and the ideal age of the wife is between the eldest and the second-eldest husbands. In large polyandrous marriages of four or five co-husbands, then, the youngest husband

[13] Goldstein has pointed to the limited divorce from polyandrous marriages in traditional Tibet and argued that, due to the adjudication system, younger husbands were unable to part from an unsatisfactory marriage. The financial costs involved, he writes, made it close to impossible to pursue a case beyond the lord (Goldstein 1971b). Today this is no longer the case.

will often be significantly younger than his wife. For instance, in the marriage in one of the houses in Sharlung with five co-husbands, the wife is fifteen years older than the youngest husband. Because of this significant age difference he has partly been raised by his wife, something recognised as potentially problematic for future sexual relations. Approaching puberty, but still enrolled in middle school in the county seat, it has been made clear to him that he will soon have to make a decision about whether to actively become part of the established marriage, or to settle and work outside the village.

Relative age is, therefore, significant not only in terms of the internal organisation of co-partnership, but also the relations between the wife and her multiple husbands. Such problems are generally solved with pragmatic and flexible solutions, and are expressed to result in unproblematic partitions. A youngest husband's marital discontent has several solutions, and those which are preferred ensure that he does not establish a new household in the village and, hence, does not activate his right to land from his natal house. One readily accepted solution is to remarry as a *makpa*, thus moving uxorilocally into his new wife's natal house and becoming the head there in due course. Such a solution does not challenge the youngest son's relations with his natal house; rather, in the amicable relations that often follow, a *makpa* will also help his natal house with labour assistance during the harvest and at other critical periods. Another solution generally described in positive terms is for him to move to the nearby urban centre, to engage in manual labour and, later, to marry and settle outside the village. While a young husband settling outside the village cannot, and does not, claim land from his natal house, those who remarry and remain in the village often activate their inheritance rights and, as such, their partition is perceived to be more complex and problematic than in the former cases. However, even in the latter cases of remarriage in the same village, such partitions do not result in full-blown conflicts of the sort that occurred in the Norkhang house.

The departure of the youngest son is, in addition to the emotional aspect of separating from his parents and siblings, seen mainly to represent a loss of labour, and his partition from the marriage is not marked ritually; nor is it sanctioned morally. The acceptance of a youngest son's wish to move must be understood in relation to the expectations of his contribution to the household as a common economic endeavour, and to the house as a corporate body in the

village community. The expectations of him are fundamentally different from those of the elder sons. Hence, while problems involving the eldest husband are expressed to be conflicts resulting in crisis, problems involving the younger husbands are seen to be simple issues to be resolved. While the significant social group, the house, remains socially unmarked by a younger husband's departure, it deteriorates significantly upon the eldest husband's establishment of a new household.

## Domestic Conflicts and Secular Morality

Domestic conflicts involve mediators of differing status, both in relation to the disputing parties and to the local community of which they are part, and in terms of formal authority. While one would expect that the formal political leadership, such as the township leaders and the county court, would not activate religious principles or values when mediating domestic conflicts, it is perhaps more surprising that the same holds true for the local mediators, that is the *ganye* and the village leader. Pirie has, in her article on secular morality, village law, and Buddhism (2006), argued that in Ladakh villagers maintain a separation of a social and a religious (cosmological) order, and that inter-personal conflicts are explained and resolved by reference to concerns for village unity, rather than in relation to Buddhist principles and values (2006: 187). Buddhism, she writes, is not understood in an ethical way (2006: 173). Similarly, the handling of domestic conflicts in Panam is founded on a secular morality, and the mediation and negotiation of these conflicts activate notions of order that are fundamentally social, rather than religious. Central to this social order is the house, not only as a building within which people perform their household activities, but also as a cultural category, a value and as the prime unit for belonging, represented by the eldest son, which local villagers seek to perpetuate across generations. It is within this secular morality that domestic conflicts develop and it is within the same morality that they are negotiated and resolved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork on which this chapter is based was conducted in a village located in Panam county during a period of five months in 2003 and 2005. I am grateful to my co-researcher, Samdrup, from Tibet University for excellent cooperation, to The Network for University Co-operation Tibet-Norway and Tibet University for access and permits, to Professor Signe Howell for supervision on the material, and to The Research Council of Norway and The Nansen Fund for generous financial support. I also thank the editors for their valuable comments.

## REFERENCES

Aziz, Barbara 1978a. *Tibetan Frontier Families*. New Delhi: Vikas.

—— 1978b. Social cohesion and reciprocation in a Tibetan community in Nepal. *In* B. Misra and J. Preston (eds), *Community, Self, Identity*. The Hague: Mouton.

Ben Jiao 2001. Socio-economic and cultural factors underlying the contemporary revival of fraternal polyandry. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Case Western Reserve University.

Carsten, Janet and Stephen Hugh-Jones (eds), 1995. *About the house: Lèvi-Strauss and beyond.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dumont, Louis 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus. The Caste System and its Implications*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

—— 1979. The anthropological community and ideology. *Social Science Information*, 18(6): 785–817.

Fjeld, Heidi 2007. The Rise of the Polyandrous House: Marriage, Kinship and Social Mobility in rural Tsang, Tibet. Unpublished doctor polit. thesis, University of Oslo.

Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph von 1964. Notes on Tamang. *Eastern Anthropologist*, 9(3–4): 166–77.

Goldstein, Melvyn 1971a. Stratification, polyandry, and family structure in Central Tibet. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 27: 64–74.

—— 1971b. The balance between centralization and decentralization in the traditional Tibetan political system. *Central Asiatic Journal*, 15(3): 170–82.

—— 1976. Fraternal polyandry and fertility in a high Himalayan valley in Northwest Nepal. *Human Ecology*, 4: 223–33.

—— 1978a. Adjudication and partition in the Tibetan stem family. *In* D.C. Buxbaum (ed.) *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

—— 1978b. Pahari and Tibetan polyandry revisited. *Ethnology*, 17(3): 325–37.

Fisher, H.Th. 1952. Polyandry. *International Archives of Ethnography*, 44(1): 106–15.

Gottlieb, Anna 1992. *Under the Kapok Tree: Identity and Difference in Beng Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Haddix, Kimber 2001. Leaving your wife and your brothers: When polyandrous marriages fall apart. *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 22: 47–60.

Hertz, Robert 1973 [1909]. The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity. *In* R. Needham (ed.) *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Howell, Signe 1995. The Lio House: Building, category, idea and value. *In* J. Carsten and S. Hugh-Jones (eds), *About the House. Lévi-Strauss and Beyond.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Judd, Ellen 1994. *Gender and Power in Rural North China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1983. *The Way of the Masks*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Levine, Nancy 1988. *Dynamics of Polyandry. Kinship, Domesticity, and Population on the Tibetan Border*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Levine, Nancy and Joan Silk 1997. Why polyandry fails. Sources of instability in polyandrous marriages. *Current Anthropology*, 38(3): 375–88.

Needham, Rodney 1973. *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

—— 1974. Age, category, and descent. *In* R. Needham (ed.) 1974. *Remarks and Inventions: Sceptical Essays about Kinship*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Palmer, Michael 1995. The reemergence of family law in post-Mao China: Marriage, divorce and reproduction. *China Quarterly*, 141: 110–34.

Pirie, Fernanda 2006. Secular morality, village law, and Buddhism in Tibetan Societies. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12: 173–90.

—— 2007. *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh: the construction of the fragile web of order*. Leiden: Brill.

Peter of Hellas and Denmark, Prince 1963. *A Study of Polyandry*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1941.The study of kinship systems. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 71: 1–18.

Stein, R.A. 1972. *Tibetan Civilization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Trevithick, Alan 1980. On panhuman preference for monandry: Is polyandry an exception? *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, XI: 154–81.

Wellens, Koen 2006. *Consecrating the Premi house: Ritual, community and the State in the borderlands of East Tibet*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oslo.

Wylie, T.V. 1959. A standard system of Tibetan transcription. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 22: 261–76.

Yeh, Emily 2004. Property relations in Tibet since decollectivization and the question of fuzziness. *Conservation and Society*, 2(1): 108–31.

## CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREW MARTIN FISCHER is a development economist at the London School of Economics. He has twenty years of experience in international development studies, including seven spent living with Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal and two conducting field research in Western China. He has published *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of Recent Economic Growth* (NIAS, 2005).

HEIDI FJELD is an anthropologist and a postdoctoral fellow at the Section for Medical Anthropology at the University of Oslo. She has carried out research in Tibet since 1995 and is the author of *Commoners and Nobles: Hereditary divisions in Tibet* (NIAS, 2005).

MELVYN C. GOLDSTEIN is the John Reynolds Harkness Professor in the Anthropology Department and the Co-Director of the Center for Research on Tibet at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, U.S.A. He is the author of numerous articles and books on Tibet and society and history, including *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (California, 1989), *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2, 1951–1955: The Calm Before the Storm* (California, 2007), *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* (California, 1997), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (with M. Kapstein, California, 1998) and *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Times and Life of Bapa Phüntso Wangye* (California, 2004).

AGNIESZKA HALEMBA is a researcher at the Centre for History and Culture of East/Central Europe at the University of Leipzig. Since 1993 she has been conducting research in the Republic of Altai, Russian Federation. She is the author of *Telengits of Southern Siberia. Landscape, Religion and Knowledge in Motion* (Routledge, 2006).

TONI HUBER is professor of Tibetan Studies at the Humboldt University, Berlin. His most recent publications include *The Holy*

*Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago, 2008), and *Nomads of Eastern Tibet. Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege* (with Rinzin Thargyal, Brill, 2007).

BEN JIAO is the Deputy Director of the Contemporary Tibetan Research Institute of the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, Tibet, China. He received his Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in 2001 and has done extensive research on social change and development in Tibetan nomadic and farming communities as well as on Tibetan education and marriage practices.

CHARLENE MAKLEY is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, USA. She is the author of *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China* (California, 2007).

FERNANDA PIRIE is an anthropologist and University Lecturer in Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Oxford. She has carried out research in Tibet since 1998 and is the author of *Peace and conflict in Ladakh: the construction of a fragile web of order* (Brill, 2007).

DAVID SNEATH is the Director of the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at Cambridge University, lecturer in Social Anthropology and a fellow of Corpus Christi College. He is a co-editor of the journal *Inner Asia*. His most recent book is *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Representations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (Columbia, 2007).

INES STOLPE is a lecturer in Mongolian Studies and a research fellow at the Humboldt University Berlin. Her Ph.D. (2008) was on interdependencies of education and nomadic pastoralism in modern Mongolia. Her recent publications deal with various aspects of cultural campaigns, such as symbolism, education and hygiene.

JILL SUDBURY is an anthropologist of Tibet. In 2007 she completed her doctorate at the University of Oxford on the Bodongpa tradition among Tibetan communities, having undertaken extensive fieldwork in both central Tibet and among the Tibetans in exile.

TANZEN LHUNDUP is Professor and Vice Director of the Institute of Sociology and Economics, at the China Tibetology Research Center in Beijing, China. He received his Ph.D. in 2001 from Peking University and has conducted numerous studies on social and economic change.

# INDEX

# Brill's Tibetan Studies Library

ISSN 1568-6183

*Recent volumes in the series*:

10/1 Beckwith, C.I. (ed.). *Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages II*. 2006. ISBN 90 04 15014 5
10/2 Klieger, P.C. (ed.). *Tibetan Borderlands*. 2006. ISBN-10: 90 04 15482 5, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15482 7
10/3 Cuevas, B.J. & K.R. Schaeffer (eds.). *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition*. Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. 2006. ISBN-10: 90 04 15351 9, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15351 6
10/4 Davidson, R.M. & C.K. Wedemeyer (eds.). *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis*. Studies in its Formative Period, 900–1400. 2006. ISBN-10: 90 04 15548 1, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15548 0
10/5 Ardussi, J.A. & F. Pommaret (eds.). *Bhutan*. Traditions and Changes. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15551 1, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15551 0
10/6 Venturino, S.J. (ed.). *Contemporary Tibetan Literary Studies*. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15516 3, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15516 9
10/7 Klimburg-Salter, D., Tropper, K. & C. Jahoda (eds.). *Text, Image and Song in Transdisciplinary Dialogue*. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15549 X, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15549 7
10/8 Heller, A. & G. Orofino (eds.). *Discoveries in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas*. Essays on History, Literature, Archaeology and Art. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15520 6
10/9 Bulag, U. E. & H. G. M. Diemberger (eds.). *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface*. Opening New Research Terrains in Inner Asia. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15521 3
10/10 Schrempf, M. (ed.). *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine*. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15550 3
10/11 Barnett, R. & R. Schwartz (eds.). *Tibetan Modernities*. Notes from the Field on Cultural and Social Change. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15522 0
11. Karmay, S.G. *The Great Perfection (rdzogs chen)*. A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism. Second edition. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15142 7, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15142 0

12. Dalton, J. & S. van Schaik. *Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang*. A Descriptive Catalogue of the Stein Collection at the British Library. 2006. ISBN-10: 90 04 15422 1, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15422 3
13. Pirie, F. *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh*. The Construction of a Fragile Web of Order. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15596 1
14. Kapstein, M. T. & B. Dotson (eds.). *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 16064 4
15. Thargyal, R. *Nomads of Eastern Tibet*. Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege. Edited by Toni Huber. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15813 9

16/1 Tarr, M. A. & S. Blackburn. *Through the Eye of Time*. Photographs of Arunachal Pradesh, 1859-2006. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16522 9

17. Balikci, A. *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors*. Village Religion in Sikkim. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16706 3
18. Achard, J-L. *Enlightened Rainbows*. The Life and Works of Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16823 7
19. Childs, G. *Tibetan Transitions*. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Fertility, Family Planning, and Demographic Change. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16808 4
20. Beek, M. van & F. Pirie (eds.). *Modern Ladakh*. Anthropological Perspectives on Continuity and Change. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16713 1
21. Pirie, F. & T. Huber (eds.). *Conflict and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia*. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 15817 7